

LES FLEURS DE FRANCE

# THE HOLIDAYS

A Book of Gay Stories

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH OF

HENRI DUVERNOIS



LONDON

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LES FLEURS DE FRANCE  
VOL. III.

# THE HOLIDAYS

A BOOK OF GAY STORIES

Translated from the French of

HENRI DUVERNOIS

## LES FLEURS DE FRANCE

*Edited by Alys Eyre Macklin*

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# THE HOLIDAYS

## A BOOK OF GAY STORIES

Translated from the French of  
HENRI DUVERNOIS

Introduction by  
ALYS EYRE MACKLIN



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## INTRODUCTION

ONE aim of this series of translations is to present from time to time to English readers representative examples of the modern French *conte*, comparatively unknown to those who do not read the language in the original. Another of its objects is to use the literature that is popular in France to-day (and therefore probably true to life) as a means of helping us towards a better comprehension of our Allies, whom we so frequently misunderstand in spite of closest ties—for what tie can be closer than that of blood shed side by side in a common cause?

This collection of some of the *contes* of Henri Duvernois answers both purposes; for Henri Duvernois is not only a master of his art, but he is essentially French both in his themes and treatment of them.

Even that "essentially French" is frequently misunderstood in this country. There is more than a tendency among those who have not lived in France to confound "French" with "Parisian." I had the good fortune to be kept from falling into this error almost as soon as I set foot in Paris when, sitting one afternoon under the trees of P. G. Hamerton's beautiful garden at Auteuil, I remarked that something was "very French."

Mr. Hamerton smiled indulgently as he replied : " Let me give you a word of warning. Do not fall into the common mistake of thinking Paris is France. Paris is a cosmopolitan City of Pleasure, and all that pleasure means ; the life-blood of France flows in her provinces, where you will find a splendid race of solid people full of solid virtues. Nor must you let the ' yellow-back novel ' influence your judgment ; it is very often nothing but part of the centralised Pleasure-scheme." It was not long before I realised that under the surface, so deceptive because the quick emotions of the Latin temperament keep it incessantly a-ripple, the French were not at all like our generally accepted idea of them, just as we are quite unlike their national conception of us. The temptation is strong to go into details ; to speak of their intense conservatism, of the beauty of their family-life, with its extraordinarily strong tie between parent and child, and the sacrifices gladly and consistently made by father and mother in the interest of the family. But I return to my starting-point : that because Henri Duvernois is essentially French, between the lines of this book the reader will obtain kaleidoscopic glimpses of French life, customs and emotions.

Occasional glimpses, too, of the " Parisian," for it is not for nothing that Duvernois has become one of the most popular writers in Paris as well as France. He pictures all aspects of life, and sees no reason for avoiding those little by-paths where we English do not—in literature, at all events—usually stray. As with most French writers, his outspokenness has the virtue of that Truth to Life which is apt to be missed through concealment and



dissimulation ; and, whatever may be said against it from our point of view, it generally has the saving grace of a sense of the ridiculous, a delicate irony that often carries with it a pointed moral lesson.

Of the art of Duvernois—alas ! that it has to be presented in the form of translation, for there can be no adequate English version of his sparkling style—one can only repeat that it possesses the qualities that are typically French ; the perfect construction that evokes a vision of those pencil-sketches, so delicate they seem breathed on the board, but beneath which we are ever conscious of the incisive drawing of the master-hand ; keen observation and penetrative power ; an extraordinarily wide range of subjects sounding every note of the lyre of human emotion : acute irony that does not hurt too much because sheathed in gay, infectious humour.

To turn to the man, Henri Duvernois is in the early forties. He is tall and clean-shaven ; his mobile face alternately suggests a grave actor or a smiling divine of the old school ; he possesses qualities that make him one of the most popular men in Paris ; his American wife is herself the author of one or two remarkable books. He will have to ask her to read this to him, for, essentially French to the last, he does not know enough English to read us in the original.

ALYS EYRE MACKLIN.



## I

### THE HOLIDAYS

M., MME. AND Mlle. THIRANNEAU were at the soup stage of dinner when the maid, Armande, broke into the dining-room, and with the tragic air she assumed under the most ordinary circumstances :

"Monsieur," she cried, "here is the hall porter wants to speak to you."

She was followed by that worthy, who thus explained his business :

"At your service, ladies and gentlemen all. I see that you are agreeably occupied, and I wish you a good appetite. I've come to give you notice that Mme. Choru and myself are leaving by the 9.45 train to-morrow morning for a trip into the country. My sister-in-law will take our place. All the tenants are on holiday ; there's no one left but yourselves. I must warn you, ladies and gentlemen all, that my sister-in-law is rather hard of hearing, and that you must ring equally hard when you want her. As for the letters, you must find out which are yours, as her sight is not what it was when she was twenty . . ."

"And so you are going away, Monsieur Choru," interrupted Mme. Thiranneau politely.

"Yes, it's only the dogs that can stand Paris in this heat," answered the porter.

Upon which, with renewed proffers of his best service to them, he withdrew. There was a silence, which was at length broken by Mlle. Thiranneau, who interpreted the general feeling :

"These people are luckier than we are! To think that we have got to stop at home this summer . . ."

"Because your mother has spent so much during the winter!" growled M. Thiranneau.

"Because your father is incompetent and lazy," snapped Mme. Thiranneau. "And now Armande has asked for a fortnight's holiday to visit her parents. We shall have a fine job to get another maid. Everyone else is off to some watering-place; we must content ourselves with the water we use for washing."

Mlle. Thiranneau's face darkened with the threat of tears.

"Gabrielle," exclaimed her father, "no crying; I won't have it! Paris in July and August is delightful. We have the Bois at our very doors, and you shall have an hour's drive in a cab every Saturday."

Mme. Thiranneau shrugged her shoulders angrily. She declared that she intended to take in hand the arrangement of family matters, and was not going to pass in the eyes of the world for a pauper, a state of things that would be fatal to Gabrielle's future prospects, and therefore she had decided on the following plan. She would intimate to their friends and connections that they would be away for a month, the vacation allowed M. Thiranneau by his official superiors. With shutters up and doors

•

locked, they would keep within the house, only going out at night. Her sister, Hermance, who lived in Switzerland, would make it her business to send the postcards, which they would write at home, and despatch to her, to the most important people of their acquaintance. In this way appearances would be saved, and she would not have to blush on their supposed return.

"A nice thing," she concluded by saying, "to be driven to lies like this, when one has had sixty thousand francs for dowry, and three thousand francs for a trousseau!"

M. Thiranneau hung his head. He was a bald, florid giant with an immense moustache, and the arm of a blacksmith. He contemplated his wife with the distrustful and restless eye of an elephant irritated by a flea and reflecting on the futility of his strength; but he held his tongue, for Armande was bringing in one of the fowls of the cooking of which she possessed the secret, raw on one side, and burnt to a cinder on the other.

Eight days later, the house they inhabited showed nothing but closed shutters under the glare of a blazing sky. They had taken care that some of their friends should visit them, on which occasion they had shown the furniture covered over, trunks in the lobby, and the carpets strewn with camphor. Everything they ate tasted of camphor for some time after; but they felt the benefit of the closed shutters, which imparted to the room an unaccustomed coolness. The maid, Armande, had gone; gone also the porter and portress, who were replaced by a deaf, blind, helpless and feeble-minded person, to whom they had to repeat twenty times the order to tell all visitors they were out of

town. They wrote postcards which their more fortunate relatives received, and sent off to their friends. Gabrielle, who was of a literary turn, was quite gushing in her fervid descriptions. "What peace! What blessed tranquillity! What depth of poetic charm in these shadowy vales, lulled to rest by the prattle of silver streams! Nothing is wanting to our happiness but the society of our dear friends." . . . "Kind remembrances to all," wrote Mme. Thiranneau. "The fare is excellent; I am thankful that I brought a thick shawl, as the evenings are cold. Gabrielle is a great success here. The mountains are more wonderful than anything I could have imagined." M. Thiranneau added his testimony with a bureaucratic flourish, accompanied sometimes by a short postscript, in which he expressed his own feelings: "It is all very delightful, but there's nothing like Paris and a good game of bridge!" Everyone knows that cooking is an unpleasant business during the dog-days, so the Thiranneaus regaled themselves with cold viands bought at the ham-and-beef shop, which even the head of the family swallowed without grumbling, for it would have been going too far to make a grievance of having to eat sausages, when he could not offer them the magnificence of the ocean and the majesty of the Alpine peaks!

One Sunday after dinner, when the father was reading his paper, the mother making her choice between ornamental embroidery and darning the useful stocking, and Gabrielle giving way to gloomy reflections, a sound made them start, the sound of some instrument being inserted into the lock of the door.

"Victor," faltered Mme. Thiranneau in a voice

subdued by fear, "Victor, do you hear that? Someone must be trying to get in . . ."

"Papa, I'm frightened!" whispered Gabrielle.

The giant turned up his sleeves. He suddenly assumed the superior air of a knight-errant under whose protection no one need be afraid, because he is the kind of person who can crack a nut between his finger and thumb, and twist up a fifty-centime piece like paper.

"Silence!" he ordered them. "Get behind me and you will be quite safe."

At the same moment the door silently opened. M. Thiranneau sprang forward. But the burglar, demoralised by finding people in the room, offered no resistance. More than half-strangled, clutched in a grip of iron, held down by a knee which dug into his breast, he whined:

"Stop! You've got me, haven't you? You're never going to kill me!"

"Gabrielle," said M. Thiranneau, as his wife fainted, "go and get some stout cord."

And he tightened his grasp, saying to the culprit:

"Scoundrel! You have got something you didn't expect, haven't you? Make the least movement and I'll throttle you!"

"But I tell you I give myself up!" protested the burglar.

He was a cadaverous young man, very respectably dressed, except for his cloth shoes and goloshes.

"God's truth!" he cried piteously, "you don't want to torture me, do you?"

Gabrielle had brought the cord, and he let himself be bound, frightened into helplessness. M. Thiranneau searched his pockets, and extracted a gold chisel, a loaded revolver, a knife with a



stop notch, a linen bag full of sand, three purses and a little jade lion, a present from Aunt Hermance, which he had stolen from the hall-table. The sight of this trinket inflamed M. Thiranneau with the fury of rightful ownership. He dealt the thief a blow which might have staggered an ox.

"Now," he said, "for the police-station! Gabrielle, run and fetch a cab!"

At these words, Mme. Thiranneau came out of her fainting-fit.

"No, Gabrielle, don't listen to your father," she groaned.

M. Thiranneau understood, and scratched his head. Any police proceedings would be reported in the papers; their friends and acquaintances would be enlightened as to their continued sojourn in Paris; the trick of the postcards would be discovered, and they would be supremely ridiculous . . . And all because of this pale-faced rascal who lay bound on the carpet, with eyes growing bright and inquisitive, and something of reassurance in his look, as if he guessed that the perplexed countenance of his executioner boded something in his favour.

"Well," he growled, "why don't you get the cab?"

"If he would promise not to do it again?" suggested Mme. Thiranneau weakly.

"Look here," said M. Thiranneau, addressing the burglar, "I'm not going to be worried any more by a swine like you; I'm going to undo your cord, and let you go, and be hanged your own way. If you're not off at once, I'll break every bone in your body!"

The burglar had a vague instinct that these



worthy citizens did not wish to be mixed up with the police.

"What did you want to knock me about for?" he answered. "I won't go unless you give me back my tools."

M. Thiranneau looked at his wife for advice; then, having unloaded the revolver:

"Take them," he said.

"And then there's something else I want—not to have had my trouble for nothing—ten francs for a glass or two to pull myself together again."

"Give him his ten francs, Papa!" begged Gabrielle.

Some minutes later, the burglar, free of his bonds, and with two five-franc pieces in his pocket, was conducted to the landing by M. Thiranneau.

"A regular prize-fighter, that old chap," he said admiringly as he went down.

And the old chap, leaning over the railing, called out by way of adieu:

"And don't be an imbecile and go boasting of all this to your friends!"



## II

### “ MONSIEUR ”

CLAUDE had taken no part in the recent divorce proceedings of his father and mother. He entertained a kind of disrespectful affection for his father. He called him “ Old Daddy.” It was indeed a very old Daddy, much bent, with a crest-fallen moustache turning very grey. One day he heard his *Fraulein* remark to the cook : “ Matame haf all der money.” Modern life is so constituted that even a child of ten cannot escape the baneful attraction of that fatal word. Henceforth he contemplated his mother with awe and veneration as a divinity in the temple of luxury, in which he was worshipper. His father he regarded as a companion somewhat beneath him ; his mother as a goddess ; he looked up to her with unspeakable, boundless adoration, and would softly whisper : “ My grand mother ! ”—which elicited an indignant disclaimer from Mme. Pontonnier.

“ What are you talking about ? Grandmother, indeed ! Little monster, you are putting twenty years on to my age ! ” And she laughed, showing her faultless teeth, confident of her beauty and perpetual youth.

M. Pontonnier, vanished without leaving any token of his individuality, while his wife filled the whole atmosphere with her mere presence. When she was away from him, the little chap sniffed like a lover at the perfume lingering behind her.

M. Pontonnier smelt like Marseilles soap and stale tobacco.

In reality, and legally, Claude's Christian name was Jules—that of his paternal grandfather; but when the decree was pronounced, Mme. Pontonnier had taken her maiden name, which was Lebraze-Dutilly, and had given her son a more euphonious Christian name.

"Jules would have been deceived by women; Claude will be worshipped," she remarked.

As for M. Pontonnier, he had resumed his occupation of designer, and the tedious, dull, circumscribed life he led before the brilliant Claire had put into execution the curious whim of making him her husband. He seemed, moreover, perfectly resigned. He had little or nothing to complain of, and swiftly relapsed into his habits of an old Bohemian; his necktie reappeared above his collar; he shambled along with his shoes in holes and down at heel; his poverty felt as comfortable as those old shoes. And he saw his son once a week.

What a holiday it was! On Wednesdays he made his appearance in the courtyard of the preparatory day-school, to which Claude had been sent in the rue des Dames. The boy watched for him at the window. At midday, the bent figure and dilapidated frock-coat of the worthy creature were descried, the melancholy slouch of his footsteps heard on the pavement.

"What a low-class person your father looks!"

commented a small school-fellow—whose father was an aristocratic butcher.

Low-class person, perhaps, but a very amiable one. First of all he gave his son a prolonged hug, a hug like those which Claude lavished on his mother, and which made her exclaim: “Stop, you smother me! Good gracious, why such violence?”

“Well, what news, Lustucru?” asked M. Pontonnier.

He would not call him Jules, and he could not call him Claude; so he made it Lustucru by way of compromise. The boy overflowed with interminable confidences embroidered with dreadful lies. They went into a cheap little restaurant, where they tasted fearsome things—snails, haricot mutton, Lyons tripe, all served on saucer-like plates.

“He fills the room with the smell of garlic!” exclaimed Mme. Pontonnier when her son came home. “It’s horrible! Take him to his room, and give him some coffee-berries to chew.”

He had to get back to school by three o’clock. They lingered over their raisins, figs, almonds, and nuts; they sipped aniseed cordial in a foggy reek of absinthe, smoke and oaths, which charmed the small diner. But M. Pontonnier became serious.

“Lustucru, are you getting on all right with your work?”

Lustucru rejoined, as if there were not the least irrelevance in his reply:

“Look, old Daddy, your tie’s over your collar again; your shirt isn’t clean; you have forgotten to brush your coat . . .”

Claude, taking after his mother, was one of those who gave orders; M. Pontonnier of those

who obey them. The latter, in fun, lifted his elbow like a child warding off a blow; then he adjusted his tie, dusted the collar of his coat, and pulled his sleeves over his questionable cuffs. . . . At fifty-seven, just think, to have a child of ten! What pride and sadness in such a reflection! . . . To see him every day would have been too much to expect . . .

"You will thank your mother for me," were always his last words when he said good-bye.

The parting took place in the Place Malesherbes. The governess was in attendance, stiff as a poker, for she espoused the cause of her employer, and they were very glad in the domestic quarters to take no more orders from a master who dressed so shabbily. M. Pontonnier bowed to her obsequiously, and resumed his drab existence until the following Wednesday.

He spoke of Claude to an old Spanish professor who lived on the same floor with him, and who listened without interrupting; for he suffered from laryngitis, and economised his voice for his pupils.

"What I like about him," reiterated the father, "is that he has so much heart. Yes, Monsieur Gomezco, I have there a youngster with a heart of gold, and that, I can truly say, he inherits from me. The ladies, you know, are always a little egoistic, a little impervious to generous impulses . . ."

In a short time, Mme. Pontonnier, who had just begun to develop a salon, found the day-school unsuitable, as much from the social as from the educational point of view. She decided to send her son to a high-class academy. She dressed him out in an English round jacket, pearl-grey trousers,

a jockey cap and varnished shoes, and gave him certain instructions, slipping a chocolate into his mouth, as into a puppy's, with the tips of her fingers.

“ Listen, my dear. You are going to an Academy where you will be in the way of forming splendid connections—you understand, splendid. There is a Cabinet Minister's son and a millionaire's son in your class. Try to make friends with them. Always keep your hair tidy and your nails clean, and I feel sure they will invite you to their homes. You are a man now, eh? One can confide in you? ”

“ Yes, Mamma.”

“ Your father will still come to see you on Wednesdays. I hardly know how to explain what I want to tell you. Your father is an artist . . . He has never taken much care of himself, and Mademoiselle tells me it is worse than ever . . . He neglects himself . . . That did not matter much in the rue des Dames . . . At the Academy, with all those parents coming to see their boys in their own carriages, it is different . . . I am anxious about it, and it may get you into difficulties . . . If other people are present, you must call him *Monsieur* . . . ”

“ Monsieur? ”

“ Yes. You needn't look like an idiot, and stare at me with eyes as big as cart-wheels. You will tell your young friends that it is a drawing-master who has taken a liking for you . . . When you are alone with your father, you will tell him that there's no use in their knowing at the Academy of your mother's divorce. What are you sniffing for? Wipe your nose. Do you understand? ”

“ Yes, Mamma.”



Wednesday came. M. Pontonnier was much impressed with the grand appearance of the Academy. He found his way into a courtyard of handsome proportions. How recognise his Jules among this crowd of young dandies, already weighed down with the responsibilities of approaching wealth? Walking between the Minister's son and the millionaire's, little Pontonnier came up to him with less alacrity than usual.

" I say, Lustucru, what swells we are ! Well, have you lost your tongue ? "

" No . . . "

" No, what ? "

" No . . . Monsieur . . . "

Claude thought his father as old as it was possible to be ; but he saw him grow suddenly older. Rather shocked, he said to his companions :

" Good-bye for the present, Pillois ; good-bye, Blumenfeld. "

And he grasped the poor hand, that trembled a little, with a pang of self-reproach. They were now in the street, and the boy tried to retrieve himself :

" And you, how are you getting on, old Daddy ? Just fancy, Daddy, I have a table-napkin with a silver monogram. . . . And I have an ebony box for pens. I'm going to learn the piano and dancing and riding ! Do you know how to mount a horse, Daddy ? "

" No, " replied M. Pontonnier, in a lifeless tone, " I don't know how to mount a horse. "

He discovered an eating-house where tables were placed out on the footway. They seemed as if they were in the country, surrounded by a row of shrubs in flower-pots. Claude clapped his hands.



What a lark it was ! The company was made up almost entirely of coachmen. One of them, his whip between his legs as he dusted his plate, was taken up with the doings of his horse :

" You'll see, he'll be on the pavement directly. Plague take him ! Wait till I come and talk to you, idiot ! "

M. Pontonnier, with a preoccupied air, broke his egg. He faltered out at last :

" Why did you call me ' Monsieur ' just now ? "

" Daddy . . . it was because of the others. "

" Ah ! . . . It was your own idea then ? "

Claude did not hesitate :

" Yes, Daddy. "

" Your own entirely ? "

" Yes, Daddy. "

" Your mother had nothing to do with it ? "

The boy persisted in his lie, which he thought a fine thing to do. He wouldn't be a sneak ; and he kept his candid eyes fixed upon his father's, the better to convince him that he was speaking the truth.

" No, " he replied.

It was as if some tie between them had suddenly snapped. M. Pontonnier looked at his son with the bewildered astonishment that his wife used to awaken in him. Ah, yes, the boy was her own, not his ; he had her sweet ways and hard heart, her superficial charm . . . That evening he discoursed foreign politics with his neighbour, the Spanish professor.

Going into the courtyard the following Wednesday, the boy did not find his father there. He discovered him outside, near the entrance, patiently waiting among a group of valets and nurses.

" Good-morning, Daddy."

M. Pontonnier replied :

" Good-morning, Claude."

It was the first time that he had called him by that name. Hitherto he had always said " Jules " or " Lustucru." . . . Then the boy's conscience pricked him. He wanted to tell the truth ; but shame sealed his lips. Tears sprang to his eyes, and he began to cry quietly to himself, much as a man does.

M. Pontonnier misunderstood the cause of his emotion, and there arose between them one of those grave misconceptions that separate sensitive souls. But all he said was :

" Don't worry, old chap : see, I have a beautiful blue necktie with white spots, a necktie that can't ruck up ; I have put on my new coat and gloves ; I'm clean-shaved, and we go and lunch at a real restaurant ! "

### III

## THE DOG THAT TALKED

ALTHOUGH she was possessed of the rosy freshness of her nineteen springs, of a nightcap that was a dream, and a nightdress that was a joy, Fanchette woke up in a very bad humour, and complained bitterly of the little breakfast that the discreet Romaine brought to her bedside.

"Do you call that chocolate?" she exclaimed indignantly. "I've told you a hundred times that I like it thick and frothy. Ugh! I might as well talk to the wind. As for the butter, a single whiff of it is enough to make one ill. Do you hear, idiot? Your butter has the appearance of chocolate, and your chocolate the appearance of butter. Once and for all, I tell you it's sickening, and I've a good mind to throw the whole boiling at you."

"Stuff and nonsense!" retorted the maid, who was apt to be familiar.

People who provoked Fanchette generally regretted doing so. Hardly had Romaine spoken when she received full in her face the contents of the cup, aimed with a deliberate hand. The little dog, Moco, who was snoring under the counterpane, began to howl. Fearing reprisals, Fanchette

jumped out of bed, and took cover in her dressing-room, where she barricaded herself. Romaine, white with rage, wiped her face with her apron.

"If the chocolate had been at all hot, I should have been badly scalded," she remarked.

At that moment, M. Leon Gratuleux, who had been pretending to be asleep so as not to be mixed up with the quarrel, showed his highly-respectable countenance, the conventional and commonplace features of which contrasted oddly with the embroidered pillow, and murmured:

"What's the matter?"

"The matter is," cried the discreet Romaine, "that I've had enough of it, and that I leave at once, though I forfeit eight days' wages. Monsieur has only to settle with me: Madame owes me a hundred and seven francs, besides my month. And I don't know that I shan't bring an action; I shall unless the doctor says there's no serious injury. I'll fetch my account-book from the kitchen."

M. Gratuleux ran to the door of the dressing-room:

"Fanchette, Romaine is leaving us. She makes out that you owe her something; she threatens us with the law courts . . ."

"Give her ten louis to hold her tongue," cried Fanchette, horribly frightened. "I won't see her. Arrange everything yourself, old darling."

Romaine came back without her apron, which made her look rather impressive. She pocketed the ten louis, and did not vouch any leave-taking except to the dog, Moco, who growled mutteringly about her petticoats, espousing her mistress's quarrel.

“Good-bye, little brute,” said she; “I don’t bear you any ill-will; you’re only a helpless animal; but, all the same, if you could talk, you would say amusing things, eh, Moco? There are people you would enlighten if you could only speak, considering that you see things that wouldn’t please them much, eh, Moco?”

M. Gratuleux had got into his trousers and slippers. He caught Romaine’s hand, detaining her as he said in a low voice:

“But *you* can speak . . . I am listening . . . That would mean something like a tip . . .”

“Do you think you’re going to make a tell-tale of me? With such a character I’m not likely to get places any more with single ladies! What’s certain is, that if Moco could speak, he could tell you something that would interest you! Ah! la! la! Good-bye all!”

M. Gratuleux cogitated profoundly. Though he had no hair left, his eyebrows approached each other in a formidable manner—a symptom, according to all tradition, of acute jealousy. Because he had met her in the rue de la Paix carrying a bandbox and wearing boots down at heel, he looked on Fanchette as still the mere apprentice. An immense mistake, from which the departing Abigail had just delivered him. He called to Moco, who was on the point of sampling the little pats of butter that had fallen on the carpet. The dog turned upon him the intelligent eye of the man of the world.

“Well, what are you trying to say?” questioned M. Gratuleux, as if he really expected an answer.

A brilliant idea suddenly flashed upon him. Moco, who followed Fanchette in all her comings and goings, Moco without whom she never left the

house, had a remarkable memory for names. M. Gratuleux called out his own name in the playful tones of Fanchette :

“Léon! Léon! Here comes Léon! Go and fetch Léon!”

Moco understood perfectly. He wagged his tail, gave his bark of welcome, and put an affectionate paw on the knee of his provisional master.

Would it work? M. Gratuleux opened his pocket diary at the date of January 2nd, and began :

“Macaire! Macaire! Here comes Macaire! Go and fetch Macaire!”

The dog did not move a muscle. Calmly and patiently M. Gratuleux went on, with the fixed intention of making the whole calendar of saints march past the sleeping memories of Moco until he should discover the fatal name that was identified with his suggested misfortune.

“Rigobert, by all that’s lucky! Here’s Rigobert . . . Lucien! . . . Juliën! . . . Guillaume! . . . Go and fetch Arcade, doggie! . . . Say how do to Felix! . . . Marcel! . . . Sebastien! . . . Raymond! . . . Babyles! . . .”

As he came to Chrysostome, Fanchette opened the door.

“What’s all this shouting?”

“Only talking to the dog. He’s so clever.”

“Little love! . . . Is Romaine gone?”

“Yes.”

“Good riddance! I’ll go to the registry office presently. I want a fair woman in the forties, who knows how to do the swell thing. You’ll see how it will work here. If she hadn’t been rude to me, I shouldn’t have thrown the chocolate in her face.

Good thing I didn't give in ; there are some ladies who would have apologised, you know . . . Anyhow, she didn't say again that she'd go to the police, did she ? ”

Reassured, she finished her toilet, and came back with an airy excuse—that she was going to see her aunt at Grenelle.

“ At least leave me Moco ; he is a little bit of yourself,” sighed M. Gratuleux insinuatingly.

“ I shall be back at eight.”

Fanchette got away with an elusive kiss, and M. Gratuleux returned to his pocket-book.

“ Moco, come here. Listen ! We got to Caşmir, Casimir ! Good-morning, Adrien ! Gregoire ! Good old Gregoire ! Cyriaque ! Ah, my little Alexandre ! ”

Moco remained sitting on his haunches, with knitted brows, as if in deep reflection. Certain names seemed to awaken in him some fleeting remembrance ; he made as if he was going to jump up, but subsided again. When Léon got to Benjamin, under date of the last day in March, some faint gleams of hope began to pierce the gloom of his jealous soul. Perhaps he had been wrong in attaching any serious meaning to the babble of a discharged maid. Nevertheless, he determined to go through with the experiment, though he felt rather humiliated by the presence of Moco, who, he fancied, now looked at him with a sort of ironical pity. Under April 8th appeared the name of Albert, and M. Gratuleux called out :

“ Albert ! ”

Hardly had he pronounced the word when Moco became intensely excited.

“ Here comes Albert ! Go and fetch Albert ! ”

The little yellow brute barked affectionately,



went to the door, sniffed, scratched at the carpet, and came back to Léon lifting up his paw.

"Fetch him then! Albert!"

He must have been a fellow of much humour, this Albert, for Moco, half-choked with joy, rushed about with his tail down, hunting and searching everywhere for his old playfellow.

"That's the one," muttered Léon. "There's not the least doubt of it!"

But his ingenious discovery did not make him any happier. Suddenly he landed a hearty kick in the rear of the astonished Moco, who was still scratching. At eight o'clock when Fanchette returned, bringing as usual a little bag of cakes for their dessert, he noticed that she looked tired, and, it might be, a little remorseful.

"It's a curious thing," he said abruptly, "that there are dogs that can speak."

"You're joking!"

"No, I'm not. I knew one that said distinctly: 'Papa, umbrella lost!'"

"You're not serious!"

"I'm very serious. He was of Moco's breed. I've been amusing myself by studying Moco's bark. When I come in, you know, he almost always calls me by name: 'Eon! . . . Eon! . . .' Well, he knows how to pronounce another name."

"Ah, and what's that?"

"Albert!"

If any doubt had lingered in M. Gratuleux's mind, it was at once dispelled by Fanchette herself. She opened her mouth as if to speak, turned scarlet, and sank down in an armchair.

"It's Romaine that's given me away!" she gasped.



"I swear it's not! It's the dog! But I've had enough, thank you. Where's my portmanteau?"

And that day saw the departure of both maid and friend. The last-named put his house in order, and started off for a six months' voyage—and returned at the end of a fortnight, looking thin and miserable. Having thrown off the last shred of self-respect, he wrote letters to the perfidious one, but they were never answered. At last he was reduced to lying in wait for her in the street. Hidden behind a goods van, and as nervous as a student keeping his first assignation, he saw her coming along at about a quarter past eight, carrying in her hand, as of old, a little bag of cakes. She was hurrying, being late as usual, to the abode of M. Gratuleux's successor. "Supplanted!" he murmured, staggering. However, he managed to make a bow and a sickly smile. Fanchette walked straight on, cold and contemptuous. And M. Gratuleux perceived that she was followed by Moco—a changed and melancholy Moco who seemed to be doing penance for some crime—and whose jaws were firmly fixed in an enormous muzzle.



## IV

### MADAME ARROUYA

It was admitted in the Quartier Saint-Denis that the Arrouyas, although of negro extraction, were very agreeable people. The family consisted of M<sup>ne</sup>. Arrouya, whose dark Kaffir complexion gave her a certain distinction ; of her husband Samuel, a grey-haired mulatto, who wore a ribbon at his button-hole denoting past services ; and of their son, Ferdinand, a good-looking fellow of swarthy appearance, who pomaded and plastered his somewhat woolly hair, and had the straight nose of his father, the glittering teeth of his mother.

Ferdinand worked, in the capacity of assistant book-keeper, in the house of business where his father had been employed for thirty years. He was a serious, shy young man, whose one interest in life was to dress magnificently on Sundays. And so it fell out that, going to buy a pair of silk laces for his varnished shoes, he fell in love with M<sup>lle</sup>. Cecile Letorju, the daughter of the lady shop-keeper, who served him. He revealed his passion to no one ; but he became visibly paler, and his mother observed the change.

"You have grown melancholy," she said to him. "When we people get to be like white folk it is because we are not happy. Are you pining for a crimson necktie?"

"Mother," replied young Arrouya, restraining his emotion, "only dark neckties are worn at present. And in any case I could not distress myself about such fooleries, seeing that I am now twenty-five." And he burst into tears.

Mme. Arrouya, much disturbed, watched her offspring closely, and in the end extracted from him his secret. She made some enquiries about the mother, who was a widow, about the daughter, of whom she heard nothing but good, made friends with them, and finally asked them to dinner. Mme. Letorju was at first rather scared at this new connection. She was a little old lady of the highest respectability, who never went out without wearing a silk petticoat and a cross between a hat and a bonnet, trimmed with black currants, drooping over leaves of jet. As for Cecile, it was plain that she had no objection to Ferdinand. Mme. Arrouya did not hesitate; she espoused her son's cause, and made a formal request for the young lady's hand.

"We are steady, honest people. My husband receives from his old employers an allowance of twelve hundred francs a year, which will revert to me, and my son earns two hundred francs a month."

Mme. Letorju raised some objections, and required certain agreements to be strictly entered into; but at last everything was arranged, even as to the expense of the wedding breakfast, and the dance that was to take place in the evening.

"I speak in the name of M. Letorju, who is no

longer on earth to speak for himself. I desire that the breakfast shall be a first-rate affair, on account of Uncle Fritot, whose money will come to us, and who lives for his food . . .”

And now nothing remained for the Arrouyas to do but to make up the thousand francs which were needed for the wedding expenses and the honeymoon of the young couple. A dreadful problem! For, thanks to their fixed income, they lived improvidently, as Africans generally do, and had not a sou laid by. And as for Ferdinand, he frittered away all his pocket-money on expensive clothes.

“Let us fix on the autumn for the wedding,” said Samuel. “Between this and then it will come all right.”

Mme. Arrouya counted very little on her husband, who was not gifted with invention, and who devoted what was left of his feeble intellect to the mysteries of backgammon. She applied to the money-lenders, but their terms horrified her plebeian soul. She sought for the visionary thousand francs as a poet searches for a rhyme, roaming the streets, her brain on the rack.

One day, as she thus loitered in the Boulevard du Temple, she was accosted by a gentleman who approached her politely, cap in hand.

“Madame,” said the stranger, “I have an interesting proposal which I should like to make to you—a proposal of a highly honourable, highly artistic nature, and one which may lead to immense advantages to yourself. Let us go, if you will oblige me, into this restaurant, where we shall be more free for a little conversation.”

He had the air and manner of a native of the South, an Arabian accent, expressed himself

with a flow of words very much like that of a Cheap Jack, and kept jerking back the jockey-cap which was balanced on his head. Mme. Arrouya followed him, and he explained himself in the following terms :

“I am an impresario, Madame : Louhar-Meleze, well known in the business ; and I am going to run, at Neuilly, a splendid show in which you could greatly assist me. Now, please listen carefully : I give twenty francs a day, paid weekly, a week’s salary in advance, money down, no nonsense, no humbug ! That’s me, Madame !”

“But what’s it all about ?” gasped Mme. Arrouya.

It was this. In an enormous travelling tent, M. Louhar-Meleze had arranged for the exhibition of the Zeni-Gobzars, a tribe of Anthropophagi.

“War dances, Scorpion Dance, Sword Dance, and the Thread-the-Needle Dance ! . . . I have eight Zeni-Gobzars, all genuine, as true as I sit here and spit to witness to the fact. But not a lady, devil take it, among the lot ! The ladies from over yonder—one has not the rotundity that is necessary, another does not fancy the business, another is afraid of being sea-sick, and another can do nothing but pound up the pilau and make the little twists of hair glisten with oil. Barca ! What says my partner who finances the show ? Says he, ‘No lady, no success at Parisee, Antonin ! You must find out some grave, substantial lady who will be well-matched with the Zeni-Gobzars ; not a lady from this or that establishment, whom the visitors could recognise, but a lady who would look the part in an artistic and instructive exhibition.’ What would you have to do ? Well, you would dance

any step you happen to know, and we would call it the Scorpion War-Dance. Then you would plaster your face with rouge to give you a terrific appearance, and yell all the time, 'Haya! Haya! Lo! Lo! Lo!' which is, as is well known, the war-cry of the Zeni-Gobzars."

"I was born in Paris," faltered Mme. Arrouya; "my husband is decorated, and my son is engaged to be married . . . What would be the dress?"

M. Louhar-Meleze mentioned a long dressing-gown of the utmost decency, slightly décolletée. He only stipulated that the feet should be bare, on account of the bangles for the ankles.

"An entertainment for the familiee, I repeat. We only open from two to six in the afternoon. That's money quickly earned, surely. Besides—you see I'm a good-natured chap—I authorise you to sell tooth-powder to the spectators. When they pay you, you must say: 'Tank you, Tank you,' as if you only understood your native tongue."

He so scraped out his r's that his throat almost took fire with the friction; and he drank glass after glass of beer, bringing his fist down on the marble table with shouts and bursts of laughter. A devil of a man, this! Mme. Arrouya, half persuaded, made a rapid mental calculation. Two months of martyrdom, and the marriage of Ferdinand and Cécile could take place with all befitting pomp and ceremony. She accepted the offer.

Samuel, however, must be taken into the secret. He demurred.

"You take up with acting!" cried he. "And suppose you get stage-struck, and unable to give it up?"

She reassured him: it would not be so attractive



as all that. And indeed it was not. The Zeni-Gobzars were deficient in point of breeding. The tribe had been gathered together from various quarters; one of them was a bootblack from Bordeaux, another a chucker-out at a restaurant in Frankfort. They were almost always drunk, they fought with and hated one another; and it was with the greatest difficulty that they could be got together when the moment came for them to emerge, bedizened with feathers and grasping their spears. As for Mme. Arrouya, she rushed behind them screaming: "Haya! Haya! Lo! Lo! Lo!" and commenced her dance. And what she danced was simply a little ballet-step her grandmother had taught her, which retained the tradition of *her* grandmother, who was a nurse in Picardy attached to a noble family. With forehead and cheeks striped with vermilion, her hair twisted into little oily knots, her ankles encumbered with bangles, she afterwards offered, across the bars of the cage, her tooth-powder, which had a ready sale, because she explained by gestures that she owed to its virtue the wonderful brilliancy of her own teeth. She contemplated the crowd with a scowl, which the spectators considered that of the true savage, but which was, in fact, one of mere wretchedness. Certain comments bestowed upon her did not tend to improve her spirits.

"Don't be afraid," said the parents to the urchins, who shrank back from her face, slashed as if by sabre cuts. "Don't be afraid; the bars are solid iron."

But one Sunday, just as M. Louhar-Meleze announced: "And now, ladies and gentlemen, the ferocious Ranaouli will perform the Scorpion



Dance!" she nearly fainted, for all at once she recognised, in the front row of the spectators, Mme. Letorju's hat-bonnet with its black currants and their leaves of jet. That stern-looking old gentleman with white whiskers at her side was doubtless M. Fritot, the formidable uncle from whom there were such expectations. She felt herself sinking, and feebly gasped out her "Haya! Haya! Lo! Lo! Lo!" while the anthropophagi screeched by way of response, "Houla! Haya! Ramafra!" The bootblack from Bordeaux beat time on a calabash, and the chucker-out from Frankfort played a barbaric air, blowing into a hollow bone. M. Louhar-Meleze vociferated:

"The Scorpion Dance! The Zeni-Gobzars perform it after they have eaten their enemies. For they only eat their enemies, ladies and gentlemen, you need have no misgiving on that point!"

The hat-bonnet moved violently as if with agitation. The marriage would certainly be broken off—poor Ferdinand! Such a sensitive boy, too, and he had just bought irresistible gloves, cream-coloured, for paying visits to his fiancée.

But while Mme. Arrouya, with a breaking heart, finished, as well as she could, her little ballet-step adapted to the savage mode of dancing, her eyes met those of Mme. Letorju—and those mother's eyes understood one another.

The pleading eyes of Mme. Arrouya said to the eyes of Mme. Letorju: "Yes, I do this so that my son may be happy," and the softened eyes of Mme. Letorju answered: "I understand, I would do the same for my child."

And when the dance was over, and Mme. Arrouya approached the bars to offer at the end of her sooty

fingers the white powder she sold, Mme. Letorju, behind her portentous brother-in-law, murmured : " See you to-night ! " and Mme. Arrouya replied joyfully, with the only fragment of civilised language permitted by her agreement with M. Louhar-Meleze :

" Tank you. Tank you . . . "

## V

### A CAPITAL IDEA

THERE are rich people who are sad and poor people who are merry, that's certain. The little town of Montignolles rejoiced in a specimen of the latter class. How had such a vagabond come to be born and vegetate in the colder North? Saturnin Ligugeard ought to have had some such name as Serafino, and have sunned his lazy form on the steps of a marble palace. At Montignolles this attractive rascal was a monstrous anomaly; he paraded his idleness in the dingy streets where a strenuous population was always at work, and everything was at variance with him—the perpetual drone of the factories, the busy haste of the passengers, the uncompromising thrift of the housewives. In this gloomy and obdurate region, even spring and summer, timid maid and matron, seemed chilled and wistful between aggressive autumns and wild winters.

Saturnin made up his mind to get out of it. He was now in his thirtieth year, and he had already the appearance of an old tree on the highway. His fellow-townsmen eyed him resentfully;

Gougière, the policeman, went so far as to forbid him to sleep in the municipal square, or even to make his bed under the sale-boards in the market-place.

"Dirty dog!" spit out Saturnin, full in his face. "You're nothing but a dirty dog, a bribe-taker. I say it again—a dirty dog!"

"You artful devil!" retorted Gougière. "You want to get into prison, and taste haricot mutton at the expense of the Government! I'm not your man. I didn't hear what you said. Pass along, or you'll feel my toe, and that's all you'll get out of me."

Saturnin changed his tactics:

"M'sieur Gougière," said he, "I'm not happy at Montignolles. Old Dad had a good pitch outside the church, where they let him sit and snore because of his grey hairs. But me, I'm treated as an interloper. I have to be up and off whenever I'm caught dozing, and it's weeks since I've been in a warm bed. So I've made up my mind to leave this place. I should like to plunk myself down at Chauvigny, where I have a pal. I only want a matter of six francs, and you should never hear of me again."

"You swear that?"

Saturnin closed his eyes, lifted his hand and spat.

Some minutes later, three forty-sou pieces to the good, he set out gaily for Chauvigny. But first, so that he might not make too bad an impression there, he had submitted his head to a hair-dresser. The shaggy vagabond, with bushy hair and wild beard, had become a clean-shaven, respectable-looking young man.

At twenty kilomètres from Montignolles,

Chauvigny showed its assemblage of dull, grey houses surrounded by barren, desolate country. On the outskirts of the town, Saturnin found his friend leaning against a stile, and presenting to passers-by the appeal of a withered arm, and the twitching movements of a contorted face, with mouth and nose twisted to the right, as if by some tremendous blow. At the sight of his mate, the beggar thrust his hand into his pocket, restored his mouth and nose to their normal position, and expressed his surprise in tranquil tones :

“ You here, Saturnin ! I see you are changed. Said good-bye to your fleas ? ”

“ It appears so,” said the other.

And he added :

“ I’ve come to settle down with you, Délingué.”  
Délingué started.

“ With me ? Curse my luck ! Things are bad enough without that ! What ! You’re going to sponge on me ? ”

Saturnin contrasted his sturdy frame with that of the shaky, besotted creature before him, and his countenance expanded into a broad grin.

“ Do you think I’m going to act the bully to get a sou or two out of a drunken forked-radish like you ? You don’t reckon me up right, my lad. If I come here, it is, first, because I’ve money in my pocket, and next because I’ve got an idea in my head. Come along, I’ll stand treat.”

Délingué brightening up at once, gathered himself together, and followed his companion with alacrity. In a neighbouring tavern they gorged themselves on bread-and-cheese and half-and-half. When they could eat no more, Ligugeard lighted a Manilla cigar, and propounded this strange question :

"What's the name of the governor of the prison here?"

"Esternuotte."

"Is he married?"

"Yes."

"All right, that'll do. You see before you a simple child who is going to take it easy, get into snug quarters, and tuck in dainties till he's fed up with them. The trouble with you, Délingué, is that you've no imagination; you stick here, with your arm, giving people the shudders, instead of hitting on some really good dodge."

"I know all about prison, anyhow: they make you work at slippers till your nails bleed, and you find tobacco quids in your soup."

"The governor's married? You're quite sure?" repeated Saturnin.

"Quite. What makes you so anxious about it? Are you going to make up to his daughter?"

"Come along . . ."

They were entering the town by a gloomy avenue. Délingué, hopping and skipping, gave utterance, in no very choice language, to the voluptuous sensations excited by a full meal. Saturnin seemed to be looking out for someone, who presently turned up in the person of a policeman.

"Look out where you're going!" he said, jostling this functionary as he passed.

"Look out yourself!" retorted the other.

"Don't you see that I've got a new cape?"

Ligueard took no notice.

"Dirty dog!" he said as before; for the vocabulary of the provinces is less copious than that of Paris. "You're nothing but a dirty dog!"

The man burst out laughing. He seemed, on



the whole, rather glad to have the monotony of his existence diversified by this eccentric joker.

"There, I've had enough of your fooling," he warned him. "Pass along."

Then Saturnin stooped down, took up a stone, aimed at a street-lamp, and smashed it to atoms.

"Under the circumstances," said the policeman regretfully, "I shall have to take you up. Don't make any resistance—consider my new cape."

Délingué, in a great fright, was screwed up against a wall.

"Good-bye, silly idiot," cried Saturnin, "you can stop there till you freeze. As for me, I'm going to grease my wheels. On we go, dirty dog!"

Thus it came to pass that Saturnin Ligugeard, assuming an air of the greatest impudence, and refusing to give his name to the magistrates before whom he was brought, made a dramatic entrance into the prison of Chauvigny, to which he was committed for a term of six months. A charming prison, with a gateway like the portal of a small inn, and enjoying the advantage of a garden upon which the chief warder bestowed his tenderest care. "Good evening, Stiff-and-Straight," said Saturnin to the sentry, who was dismally absorbing the rain, "it's a fine thing to have a hall porter!" At Chauvigny the prisoners are not treated with severity. The present one was soon found to be a valuable acquisition on account of his skill in imitating the drum with his lips, and his indomitable cheerfulness. And when he asked for a sheet of notepaper and pen and ink, he received it at once.

"I have an important letter to write," he confided to the chief warder. "You will deliver it to Mme. Esternuotte by hand."

"If it is to ask a favour," said the warder, "you may save yourself the trouble. Mother Esternuotte is what you might call a sergeant-major; she does as she likes here; she has a beard, and gives the inspectors their instructions."

"I know her personally," replied Saturnin.

And he wrote the following lines:—

Madame,

Though a mystery surrounds my birth, I am the scion of a noble family. You may be assured of the truth of this, seeing that I was arrested of my own free will; that I had money on me at the moment of arrest, as you can ascertain on inquiry, and that I had been dining expensively at a restaurant with a gentleman of independent means.

Why, then, did I endeavour to get myself arrested?

It was, Madame, because my heart is filled with love for a certain person, and that I longed to be near her. If I had not been the scion of a noble family, I should have tried to get myself arrested for theft. But I could not, even from motives which concern my passion, cast a stain on the noble name I bear.

So here I am for six months quite close to her whom I adore—to you. Yes, Madame, I avow it with all the sincerity of a heart burning with love. The sight of your beauty has driven me nearly mad. Deign but to honour me with a visit, and you will overwhelm with joy one who worships you.

S. DE L . . .

No. 183, prison de Chauvigny.



Saturnin sealed and addressed the letter.

"You will give this to Mme. Esternuotte—with your own hand, mind. Be sure that the governor does not see you."

And as the warder, thoroughly puzzled, was leaving him:

"Tell me, my friend," questioned Ligugeard; "when a prisoner is recommended for special favour, he doesn't work in the shed, eh?"

"Not if he knows it. And he has meat with all his meals—and prunes—and story books! . . . We had one who was nephew to the laundress of this very lady . . ."

That night Saturnin's sleep was filled with delightful visions of the future; joints of roast beef, red and juicy, prunes in thick syrup, and a complete edition of Alexandre Dumas père flitted in procession before his imagination . . . Six months opened out to him a charming perspective of creature comforts, from which he would emerge plump and rosy, six months of all play and no work, six months of sleeping and gorging.

The next night, after lights were out, he heard a key softly turned in the lock, and a bearded face appeared at the peep-hole. "Good! A new warder!" he thought to himself. But an immense figure outlined itself in the doorway, and an agitated voice whispered:

"Unhappy young man!"

It was Mme. Esternuotte, in whom all the leaven of romance was fermenting.

"Give me your hand!" she petitioned.

Much surprised, Saturnin held out his hand, which she squeezed in feverish acknowledgment.

"Hush! Follow me . . . I have got the

warders out of the way . . . I have made the sentry on patrol drunk . . . Follow me . . .”

They passed along the dark passage, crossed the garden, and came to the gate, which was half-open. There, Ligugeard, feeling himself pulled imperiously towards her, saluted with his nose the beard of the majestic lady, who bestowed on him a chaste kiss, and then pushed him away as if repelling temptation . . . And before he realised what was happening, Saturnin found himself in the street, a street icy-cold and drenched with the incessant rain for which Chauvigny is notorious . . .

“Farewell,” sighed Mme. Esternuotte in a faint voice . . . “farewell, you who might perhaps have understood me. I am a virtuous woman . . . but for your sake, I have betrayed my trust . . . You are free!”

## VI

### THE HOTEL

As the train stopped, Alphonse Hermoso sprang out with his head lowered like a bull ; he jostled the passengers, jerked his ticket into the hand of the collector, and, radiant with anticipation and flushed with pleasure, filled his lungs with the atmosphere of Paris. A scented atmosphere, it seemed to him. Nothing encumbered him, neither portmanteau, trunk nor stick ; he would leave his luggage in the cloak-room until he had found a hotel to his liking. Having no confidence in the judgment of others, he determined to make the search in person. But first he looked about him, and tried to visualise his past and present circumstances. At the age of twenty he had come up to Paris from his distant home with two hundred thousand francs to his credit and a heart burning with desire. After eight months of riot and dissipation, the two hundred thousand francs had disappeared. Then he had resolved to make a fresh fortune. With that intention he had returned to the country where birds of gorgeous hue abounded, and after twenty years of sordid strivings, had acquired wealth by

trading in their plumage. During that twenty years his only solace had been the charming post-cards whereon Parisian beauty is typified by ladies of over forty dancing before gentlemen in smart evening-dress. The interior of the kind of parrot-house in which he lived was covered with these artistic studies. His housekeeper, a negress, used to hear him saying dreamily to himself: "Mouline-Rouche! Mouline-Rouche!"—and now his hopes were realised! He trod once more the land of his visions; he was going to enjoy life. And he buttoned his jacket over his breast to keep his pocket-book safe.

In bygone days, he lodged at the rue des Petites-Ecuries, but he had flitted to Montmartre, where Carmen, a fair little woman, attracted him by her personal charm, her penetrating scents, her smiles and her insolence. He now fought shy of that neighbourhood; he would be chaffed on account of his sun-browned skin and his hairy hands, which were all the more conspicuous for their flashing diamonds. He would only go there if he were obliged to. Besides, Carmen, dowered with the greater part of the two hundred thousand francs, must have found some pleasant retreat suitable to gay ladies who are getting on in years. Hermoso promised himself entertainments of a more exciting and less expensive nature. His pursuit of pleasure was tempered with prudence; for a certain suspicion of everyone now moderated the fire of his jet-black eyeballs, now set in yellow-whites, and every male he passed was for him a potential garotter, every female a sharper.

In this frame of mind he strolled about the quays, affecting the leisure of a Parisian taking a walk, lit a

cigar as fat and dry and black as himself, and drifted into those colourless streets which Barbey d'Aurevilly loved for their flavour of aristocracy, and for their nearness to the faubourg Saint-Germain! What peace! How quiet! An equivocal-looking individual offered him some pictorial transparencies, to which he promptly replied: "I have a revolver in my pocket!" which, of course, proved that he was a person perfectly well acquainted with the town, a resolute character, and a match for anyone who tried to play tricks on him. Nor, in that respect, were women likely to be more successful than men. For the benefit of the Parisiennes he had brought a case full of the most splendid specimens of his trade—lopophote, marabout, peacock feathers, all patiently collected with a view to possible needs, from the noble egret that towers above the head of the lady of fashion, to the paradise plume that nods carelessly over a pretty head a little giddy with champagne.

He looked at himself in a shop-mirror, and was satisfied with the result. He had shining varnished boots of brown morocco, a Havana suit, a green tie, and a light brown bowler hat. Thus, with his hands stuck in his pockets, a cigar in his mouth, and an air of having nothing to do, he suggested the dandified rogue who is up to some mischief on the Boulevards. At present, his business was to find a suitable lodging. The street in which he now found himself seemed a very likely one. Looking up, he saw engraved in letters of gold on black marble, the inscription:

HÔTEL DE CREUIL-BUDINCOURT.

The approach to the house, which was unlike any

other hotel he had seen, was spacious and handsome. Some old-fashioned carriages were setting down their occupants before a flight of steps presided over by a person of portly appearance with white whiskers, and dressed in black. "As good as any other," soliloquised Hermoso. "It looks impressive enough and will be a good place to see my business people." The stateliness of the building impressed him more than he admitted to himself; he threw away his cigar, cocked his hat on one side, and eyed truculently the concierge who seemed about to question him. In the hall, his reply to an attendant asking his name was: "You will bring me the register presently; I want to look round first." And just then a stream of arrivals thrust him towards a refreshment bar covered with dainty food. He had some lemonade, a glass of champagne and a sandwich, asked: "How much?" and added, to the mute astonishment of the waiter, "You will put that down to my account." The hall was full of people. Hermoso was staring at the women like a self-satisfied connoisseur when an old lady in prune brocade literally threw herself into his arms.

"Maître!" she exclaimed, "Maître! M. Follestin has prepared us for your visit, but we did not expect you before six. And no one to receive you! Excuse my confusion—I am so agitated! And M. Follestin has not arrived! You see, I have invited in your honour all the prettiest women in Paris, and all the literary lions! If my hotel were burnt down at this moment, all France would go into mourning."

"I have left my trunks at the station," replied Hermoso, stupefied by this torrent of words. And he added with a wink:



"There is one of them full of the finest quills."

"You are going on with your work then?"

"I still have some customers here. Not that I need them. I've made as much money as I want."

The dowager Marquise de Creuil-Budincourt had imagined that our great writers expressed themselves in less commercial terms, and he smiled as she introduced Hermoso to a lady with an obviously artificial complexion, who was introduced as "Madame Gevandan, one of your most ardent admirers." Then she went off to spread the good news.

"Benbenita, the great poet, has arrived. Monsieur Follestin has sent him. He is superb—eyes like Balzac's, brown, flecked with gold."

"But he's dressed like a mountebank, this great man of yours," objected Mme. de Seischebuque, peering through her lorgnette.

"He knew that there would be a great many artists here, a mixture of all kinds of people," replied Mme. de Creuil-Budincourt. "We'll go into the ball-room directly; Clarisse will recite his poems. For the moment I have left him with Mme. Gevandan, who is crazy about him. After Clarisse has recited, the little girls from my orphanage will sing their madrigal, 'All honour to Jean-Sebastien Benbenita,' to a waltz-tune—a charming little thing."

Alphonse Hermoso had never produced on any human being the impression that was plainly visible upon the delicate features of Mme. Gevandan. This lady, languid, drooping like a fading flower, squeezing in her tremulous hands a lace handker-

chief, with quivering eyelids and nostrils, seemed to the stranger too polite to be honest.

"Above all, I hate all sorts of trickery," he warned her.

"Yes, yes," agreed Mme. Gevandan. "If it is not pure, poetry is not true art. It is nothing if it is not sincere. I am fascinated, charmed . . ."

"I will give you one of my finest quills," interrupted Hermoso.

"I should not have dared to ask such a thing, Maître! What a keepsake!" gushed Mme. Gevandan as she led him into the ball-room.

There it was all dark. They felt their way to two vacant seats. A jet of gas, maliciously directed, brought into evidence the wrinkles of a mature lady, who held a book in her hand, and declaimed in funereal tones.

"I have monopolised you too long, Maître," whispered Mme. Gevandan.

"When I am at home," corrected Alphonse, "they address me as 'Excellency' . . ."

This obscurity was charming, and it made the Hôtel de Creuil-Budincourt momentarily resemble that famous establishment in Austro-Hungary, where the complaisant lady-visitors dance for awhile and polka with the utmost propriety before disappearing with their partners. Hermoso, however, gave the preference to Paris, and to this refined and sensitive soul, who kept repeating in a languishing voice: "It is too much! It is too much! What beauty; what divine images in these verses!" As she bent forward, he hovered over her neck, and breathed the perfumed charm of her presence. Ah, to long for Paris during twenty years, and to inhale it like that at the



very outset! A superb creature who would no doubt just love him for himself. Hesitating no longer, Hermoso impressed a warm kiss on the swan-like neck. He felt a startled movement, and heard a stifled protestation: "Oh, Monsieur, Monsieur, that is unworthy of you!"

So she was going to put a price on herself after all! Very pretty, but useless. His confidence was shaken, and fearing that the droning recitation might send him into a sleep from which he might awake to find his purse gone, he got up stealthily and slipped out on tiptoe.

He was lighting a fresh cigar in the hall, when a rustle of silk made him turn round. It was the old lady.

"What, Maître!" she cried. "You are going!"

"I am going to look after my luggage."

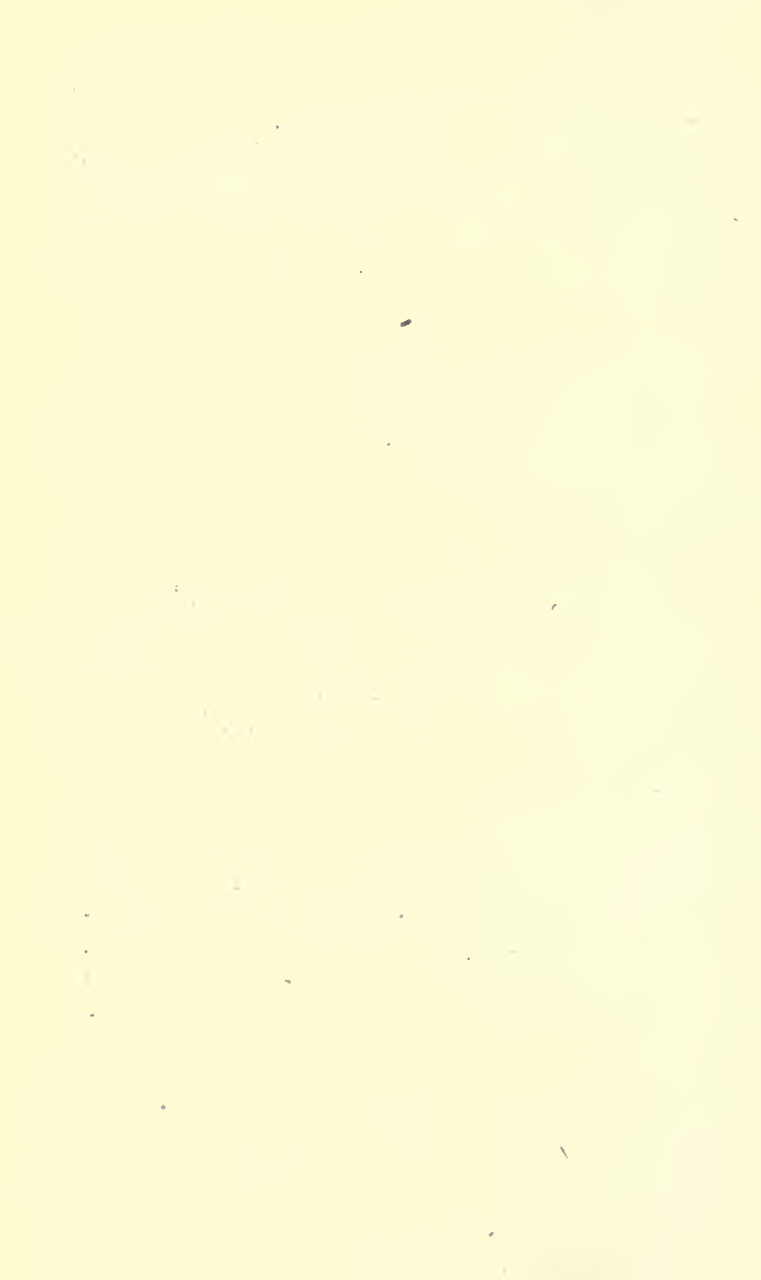
"One of the servants can see to that . . . Oh, Maître, what a disappointment for us! And just as they are going to sing . . ."

"I am going after my luggage . . ."

"But I hope you will do us the honour of staying here."

Hermoso pushed back his light brown bowler with a jerk, took from his mouth the cigar he was sucking, and explained himself in these terms:

"No, Ma, it won't do. I must stay at a respectable hotel where I can see the feather-merchants. I'll come back here when I want to have a razzle-dazzle."



## VII

### MY DIPLOMAT

I LEARN that instead of a formal betrothal party the Speeneckers are going to give a garden-party on Sunday, September 16.

Geneviève Deplantin, who is worth three millions, is going to marry young Speenecker, who is worth more than thirty millions. Please do not assume that this American way of putting it conceals a subtle irony. In my humble opinion, one ought to look upon wealth with eyes free from hate or admiration. . . . In any case it is always nice to know rich people: they are well-dressed, they dwell in sumptuous houses, in which it is very pleasant to be. The Speeneckers' mansion, I am told, is wonderful. It is surrounded by a park—a park in Paris where they even had a couple of cows grazing on grass valued at a sovereign a blade. They gave up the cows, because it was impossible to keep them clean. And in their stead there are a dozen superb toy-dogs, which I admired at the Dog Show, and which are so scented and combed as to be one of the wonders of the house. Old Mr. Speenecker, it is said, has planned

extraordinary attractions, a garden-party under the shade of illustrious trees that once sheltered the reveries of a Duc d'Orleans, the first owner of the mansion.

I mean to make myself beautiful.

A feverish business. "Your eighteen years are adornment enough," said my father, who is a physician and philosopher, and whose utmost concession to dress is to exchange, when the fine weather returns, his black silk cravat for a white piqué scarf. My father refused to go to "those people," as he calls them with a disdain which I do not share. And mother paid no attention to his remark.

I am going to be all in white, with a hat adorably trimmed with an 1830 wreath of roses of all shades from the almost black to the white, passing through the red and pink. I shall look like some figure of Winterhalter's come down out of its frame, and I evoke a picture of myself flirting with a gallant officer in the Guards, wearing the splendid uniform of that period, his moustaches well turned up. I have ventured on a dress-rehearsal, but in spite of the success it seemed, I am somewhat uneasy. The setting was our modest flat (3,200 francs a year, central heating in the ante-chamber and the drawing-room); for audience, Charlotte the cook, Berthe, the maid, and my mother. If only my dress and hat could look the same in the Speenecker park in the eyes of all the rich and famous people of Paris! But I have no such hopes. I remember a caricature showing on one side *The Dream*, and on the other *The Reality*. The Dream shows a young girl of my age, lovely and radiant, entering a drawing-room where everyone turns to look at her; the girl

has made a sensation. The Reality is different: the same girl enters, and passes unperceived through a crowd in which no one takes any notice of her.

Well, we shall see what we shall see.

Besides, I have quite made up my mind. If I do not very soon come upon a suitable husband, I shall go on the stage. I love suppers; I understand men, and I can recite a monologue very cleverly. I shall go from success to success. I will make someone give me a pearl necklace, with fifteen rows of pearls, and a car.

The Day of Days has come. It is half-past two. Our taxi crawls behind a hundred carriages, throbbing as with little groans. What a crowd! And by vile luck we have struck a talkative and sour-tempered chauffeur. He turns his red face towards us, and suggests putting us down where we are. I vigorously object. Think of arriving on foot! Every two minutes our man, who is much too familiar, tells us what he thinks: "I can't waste my whole day here. Did you ever see such a rabble? I have a fare waiting for me in Montorgueil Street . . ." and so on. Then he becomes ironical, and turns to a cab-driver: "What's going on there? Handing out sovereigns at a shilling apiece?" The cabby smiles approvingly, opening a hideous mouth that reveals three teeth. I seize the speaking-tube and order the chauffeur to hold his tongue.

"Righto! Sergeant," he returns with a military salute. And everyone laughs. Such are the delights of being no one in particular!

At last we get there. The master of ceremonies, who has just announced a well-known novelist, calls out our undistinguished patronymic:

“ Madame and Mademoiselle Brévillac.”

Geneviève Deplantin hastens to us. Geneviève engaged ! Her nose is so thin, so short, so squeezed together, that it is wonderful that she can breathe, and her hands are strong and big enough to count all her husband's money without tiring. Why does this millionaire want to marry her ? Geneviève, pretending to be a pal, pretending to be playful, pretending to be happy, introduces him to me.

“ Darling, this is my fiancé ; Edmund, let me introduce you to Hélène Brévillac, one of my dearest friends, the daughter of Dr. Brévillac.”

We bombard one another with commonplaces. Edmund Speenecker wears a beard : that is enough for me : I do not even look at him. Out of that beard emerges the announcement that many friends would be delighted to know me, and that it, the beard, will go and fetch a couple of them.

Mother has vanished and left me alone.

Here come the friends : their names are muttered. One of them is a man with flaming red hair ; the other is small, unintelligent-looking, with fish-eyes behind a pair of professorial glasses. I see how it is ; the former is a medical student, the latter a young doctor. The pair are about, if I may use such an expression, to bore me stiff. The shorter one, especially, with his fluting voice and namby-pamby manner, shows signs of fastening on to me. He starts on a medical talk.

“ Is your father Dr. Brévillac of the Tuberculosis Hospital ? ”

A Hungarian gipsy-band, out in the garden, begins to play a witching waltz. My two cavaliers talk of father's works.

A brilliant thought strikes me.

"I wonder if you would like to meet my father?"

They became enthusiastic.

"I will go and fetch him."

And I flee. Now, at least I can look round and admire.

The rooms, with their great French windows, show on the walls medallions bearing the monograms of the former owners of the mansion. There are paintings by Lancret, Watteau, Boilly, and also, alas! the portrait of the present owner, a daub by one of the most detestable fashionable painters of the day. Outside, the guests are dancing on the lawns overlaid with flooring. I admire the giant trees which grow amid the Parisian air with a look of insulting health that seems to say: "I do not need to go to the country."

Mr. Speenecker, senior, thin and stiff, and looking like an old infantry sergeant by dint of trying to look like a young cavalry colonel, is showing people the pictures. I hear him say:

"I paid a hundred thousand francs for that one at the sale of a marquis's things. Note the shine of the dress: connoisseurs tell me it is remarkable."

Young Speenecker and his beard reappear.

"Mademoiselle Brévillac, permit me to present Mr. le Hestu de la Bastonneroie."

Mr. Hestu, etc., is a stammerer, and looks at me with the air of a dog that has just been thrashed, and drops of sweat show on his candid forehead. I am willing to swear that this is his first appearance in society. He tries hard not to stutter, and almost succeeds, but the utterance of every word is preceded by the most frightful efforts on his part:



an agonising, choking sound comes from his throat, but he gets the word out at last with the sense of satisfaction of a man who has achieved a sneeze. I try to speak in my turn, but he gesticulates wildly like a drowning man. Horror! my stutterer loves to talk!

I direct his steps to the refreshment-room, hoping that eating will at least keep him silent. No use. He feels he must be attentive. He is soon quite at his ease, and is rash enough to call aloud for champagne, not without certain difficulties that make the attendants turn away their faces. I can stand it no longer, and, cup in hand, I steal away to the small drawing-room where the wedding presents are on show.

Mr. le Hestu de la Bastonneroie dashes after me, and pushes me against a solitary gentleman. I stumble, upset my cup on the gentleman's sleeve, and would have fallen had he not held me up with a strong hand. I wipe his sleeve, and smile at him, then direct a stern glance upon Mr. le Hestu, and bow in a final way which eliminates him.

My new companion laughs outright.

"The poor chap is in despair," he says.

"A man should not be so awkward," I reply.

Rather nice-looking, this stranger that chance has thrown in my way. He is about twenty-five, well-dressed, a small tricolour ribbon in his button-hole, the life-saving medal—in my opinion he has just earned another! We talk in quite a friendly fashion. It is the room in which are ostentatiously displayed the presents given to the young couple, and it is deserted.

We inspect the various articles: it is good fun. There are twenty salt-cellars; there are at least



four of each sort of present. It is amusing, but the stranger does not laugh : he is singularly grave for his years. He must be a young diplomat, so I talk diplomacy, and he changes the conversation. I wonder if he is afraid that I might give away his secrets ? I beg him not to leave me, for now my young doctor has found me, and is coming towards us. I cannot stop him : here he is. He bows to my diplomat, and with an awkward gesture mumbles :

“ I am fortunate to meet your father at last.”

We both laugh out loud, can't help it.

The imbecile tries to apologise :

“ I am so short-sighted.”

I explain :

“ My father has had to leave, but another time . . . ”

The little incident has made me and my diplomat quite friendly. I feel as if I had known him quite a long time. He talks about the guests.

“ You have no idea, Mademoiselle, what a mixed crowd you get at a reception of this kind.”

“ Really ? ”

“ Yes. All sorts and kinds of people. There is M. Lestrillière, former Ambassador of France to Rome, Grand Cross of the Legion of Honour, and next to him stands a swindler who has been kicked out of every club in Paris for cheating ; he can't even show his face in any casino in Normandy.”

“ Is it possible ? ”

“ People of that sort always manage to make their way in, sometimes with the help of a servant, or simply by walking boldly in. As they are always well dressed, no one dares ask who has invited them.”

"But how dreadful!"

"It is like that in Paris. And they are not the only queer ones. There are those you would not dream of suspecting: lady-kleptomaniacs, for instance, many of whom are admired and sought after in Paris drawing-rooms."

"Do you go to many balls, Monsieur?"

"Alas, yes, Mademoiselle."

"Why 'alas'?"

"Because, save on very rare occasions, such as the present, it is a frightful bore."

"Well, I'll confess to you that this is the first big reception I have ever been to. My parents are very quiet people. But we do have little dances for our friends, from nine to eleven, and . . ."

Mother, in the next room, is waving frantically to me with her fan.

"That is my mother over there. Will you come with me, and Monsieur Speenecker will introduce us formally . . ."

The stranger looks uneasy.

"I would do so with much pleasure, Mademoiselle, but I must not leave this room."

"Not leave the room! Shall I be indiscreet if I ask why?"

"Not at all. I am the detective who is here to watch the presents!"

\* \* \* \* \*

Next week I go on to the stage.

## VIII

### THE MODEL

THE train was running through the dull country that lies just outside Paris, and Gérard-Amédée Foissenange watched his wife, who was quietly sleeping.

"If she looks very plain," he said to himself, "it is because we are just returning from Italy. Paris, too, will seem hideous. But once at home, all will be different. I shall find a charming flat furnished by her parents regardless of expense. I shall have a real English study, such as I have always dreamed of, and a wadded dressing-gown. I shall write with a gold pen on superfine paper. I shall be nourished with succulent game and fine wines . . . Hang it all, I am thirty-four. It's time I set to work and made a name . . . Even supposing perfect happiness does not come to me, literature will fill up the gaps and satisfy my imagination. The girls, who took my money, and were unfaithful into the bargain, were not really pretty either. Berthe is all right for a married woman. It's true, she is rather old-maidish, with the sort of angularity and stand-offishness that induce

respect rather than love. All the better. As if I should prefer her neck to be like a light o' love's ! As for her hair, it can be improved : it is only a matter of money. Then, in my opinion, she possesses that calm intelligence which is needed in the wife of an artist. She is wrong to show her full face ; her profile is a hundred times better . . . What an ass I am ! Now she shows her profile ! Why, she looks a hundred times better full-face ; has something of a Greek look then. Oh, rot ! I am like all poets : I do not know what I want."

"What are you thinking of, pet lamb ?" asked Berthe as she woke.

"Of you, ducky," replied Gérard-Amédée. "Here we are. I'll look after the luggage. Better put on your hat."

Mme. Foissenange was gazing into vacancy, her mouth set in hard lines, her eyes bewildered.

"Where are we ?" she murmured, for it took her some time to wake fully.

"In Paris. Here are the suburbs, with their seven-story houses, and their own particular odour, which in no way recalls the scent of the orange-trees in bloom. We shall be home in a few minutes. No doubt your people are waiting for us at the station."

"No, pet lamb ; we shall be alone. Papa and mamma wanted to leave us by ourselves to enjoy the surprise of seeing our new home."

And it was a surprise with a vengeance ! Gérard-Amédée Foissenange, after passing through a drawing-room like a new-art tea-shop, with staring ornaments, and a dining-room that recalled taverns with imitation stained-glass windows, dashed into his study.

“Great heavens!” he moaned. “A business office! All there: green-backed files: *Current business: Accounts: Letters to be answered.* Lord above! All it needs is a railing, ticket-window and a cashier.”

“Mamma is not a novelist,” returned Berthe, “she looks on the practical side of things, and I think she is right. It is never the tools that are bad, but the workman who is unskilful. And I should like to know why you couldn’t compose a masterpiece on a typewriter. For my part, I am so delighted with all this that I could weep for joy. I see a kindly thought in everything. Take our bed, for instance: it is so narrow that it makes me blush only to look at it. And the pictures! Not a single landscape, only *genre* pictures. And I can assure you they are highly-finished; you could spend hours studying the details in them. There’s the one in the drawing-room, which shows an amateur in the shop of a dealer in antiquities: why you can read the price marked on each article! And the flat itself, pet lamb! I know we have only cold water at present, but soon we shall have hot as well. There is a telephone downstairs in the concierge’s lodge, and the woman always answers it, except when she goes marketing, or is cleaning somewhere in the house. On the floor above is a teacher of the piano, a real professor, who will play for us for nothing all the time. The stairs are rather steep, as in most houses with lifts, but the lift will not always be undergoing repairs. The whole flat is heated, except the dining-room, the bedroom and your study. Mamma wrote me that it would be wiser not to light fires in the grates, because the grates of centrally-heated houses are mostly for

show. But all these matters are my business. What you have to do is to begin work at once, so as to get into the habit of it."

"Give me a chance to settle down. I am going to ring for the maid."

"She is called Solange. Mamma engaged her: she is a real hard worker. Just at present she has a little trouble: a whitlow on her right hand and a gumboil. But she goes out all the same. As she says: 'Suppose I got erysipelas, it would not prevent my working.' Follow her example, pet lamb. I know that you literary men are inclined to be lazy."

After a wash and brush up, Gérard-Amédée sat down in a brutally uncomfortable armchair, designed by an upholsterer antagonistic to cosy literary reveries. He seized a book-keeper's penholder, in which a nib was stuck sideways, like a bayonet, and shivered at sight of the vile-lined paper. But he felt that desire for work which seizes on the laziest after a long period of idleness, and that strange inclination which may be called the hunger of writing. So he wrote.

An hour later, Berthe, wearing a kimono, Berthe, business-like and peremptory, turned up. She had made herself comfortable, as she called it, and looked, with her flannelette gown, and her hair twisted on top of her head, more like a servant than the mistress of the house.

"Are you getting on?" she asked, her face severe.

Getting on! Foissenange had worked off his wrath upon the paper. To his flat, marked by all possible discomfort, he had opposed the fiction of an ideal home, vast as a palace, cosy as a cottage,



in which the sound of cool waters mingled with the soft notes of a wondrous symphony. Within that home dwelt a woman, and what a woman! Gérard had frankly depicted her for his own satisfaction, without a thought of the part she might play in the course of his story. He had begun with these mysterious words: "There was a woman. Her name was Purpurine."

"Read me what you have written," ordered Berthe.

Gérard hesitated, cursing inwardly his blunder. Berthe would see at once that he had endowed his heroine with all the physical and moral charms that she herself lacked.

But as she expressed surprise at his silence he was compelled to read:

"There was a woman. Her name was Purpurine. Looking at her full face, one felt that she was even more beautiful than in profile, but if she turned her head slightly, she was even more lovely in profile than full face. She dazzled like diamonds and shone like pearls. Her hair formed a halo of amber and sunshine; her glance was a caress, and the motion of her lips a kiss. She woke, smiling and radiant. The light sparkling on her tempting neck, her rounded arms, her bosom swelling with the springtide . . ."

"Stop!" cried Berthe.

And she explained.

"Naughty pet lamb, you make me blush! When I think that thousands of people will read that! Oh, darling, I feel as if you were undressing me before them. Oh! Oh! Oh! I should like to hide in the cupboard . . . But I'd rather kiss you! It's beautiful, what you have written, and

anything but commonplace. After all, you know, I am a bit of a coquette, like all women. So, never mind, pet lamb, seeing I have begun, I will go on being your model, though I dare say you have exaggerated a little. Love does transform everyone, you know."

Gérard was thunderstruck. She actually believed she was Purpurine! He exulted internally, and blessed the touching conceit which would thus enable him to carry on his work without difficulties. And when he described the death of his heroine, Berthe wept over her own death, as she took it, and sobbed.

"I wonder you had the courage to write that."

When the book was published she took care to show herself everywhere. Her friends pitied her among themselves. "Poor woman," they would say, "to think she has read all that nastiness, inspired, no doubt, by some mistress of his!" And they were surprised to see her so bright, looking as if she were trying to keep back a secret she burned to tell.

So the story of Purpurine was born, and died without arousing any more comments. Foissenange took a rest.

Then, thinking of doing something less imaginative, he looked round, and acquired the habit of noting those expressions one hears at times, which open up such wide horizons in human stupidity. He soon perceived that here at his side he possessed an inexhaustible seam of these in the person of his wedded wife. So he made notes of her remarks:

"If I owned a villa, I should like it to be tiny, and I would call it 'Good Enough.' We would never



have people there. No ; I would call it ' Welcome Home.' "

Or :

" When I heard that millionaire say to my husband : ' I have often sung your praises,' I did not hesitate to tell him straight out : ' Yes, but you never buy his books. Bah ! No one buys books now-a-days.' "

Or :

" My husband reads me whatever he writes. He calls me ' the forest.' Isn't it sweet and poetical of him ? "

Or :

" Gérard is very unselfish where his friends are concerned. He is always talking of a certain Balzac as being a man of genius. I should like to know what Balzac says of him. I am continually repeating to him that there ought to be fair exchange : let Balzac praise him. But Gérard has no idea of reciprocity."

These notes grew so rapidly that soon Foissenange made them into a novel. And then came the dread moment when the manuscript had to be read to his wife. In it was detailed, day by day, hour by hour, their whole married life. And Berthe's sayings and expressions were all set down word for word. She would never understand that a man has to sacrifice himself to his art ! She would never forgive him. She would probably insist on a divorce.

He read the manuscript to her in fear and trembling, and when he ended, he closed his eyes as he waited for the verdict. Not a sound. Mme. Foissenange was sulking, and held her tongue.

"Well," he ventured at last, "what do you think of it?"

"Not so bad," returned Berthe, "but I do not find it interesting. It isn't as good as Purpurine. Ah, pet lamb, it's easy to see we've been married a year! You never make any allusion to me in anything you do now."

## IX

### THE WELL-TRAINED POODLE

BELL CHAMBREUIL had alighted from her car to walk a little on the embankment when an incident worthy of a chromo-lithograph attracted her attention. An old beggar had just fallen down mortally stricken with apoplexy; his poodle was whining piteously, licking his master's face, and then running to his little wooden bowl, which he took up and dropped repeatedly, as if doubtful now as to what was expected of him. Bell's heart was touched: she loved dogs with the passion of women who have not found in marriage an object on which to lavish their affection; she loved them with the heart of an old maid. Meanwhile, the crowd increased and philosophised according to its wont: "Better for him to be gone—the poor tyke's the most to be pitied." And indeed the poodle howled dismally as they bore away his dead master. Bell approached a policeman.

"May I take the dog? It will be well cared for. This is my card."

"Deuce take me if I know!" said the man, scratching his head.

"Will you come with me?" Bell asked the dog.

Upon the lady who spoke in such caressing tones the creature turned a wistful eye, in which, as the poets say, gathered a pearly tear, and resigning himself to his lot, took refuge in her protecting skirts. The crowd, touched by these traditional elements of pathos—the death of the beggar, the kind-heartedness of the rich and generous lady—would have been better pleased with a little more reluctance on the part of the faithful poodle. However, it gave its assent to the transaction. Blushing with confusion, Bell Chambreuil called up her car, and they were soon all inside it, the lady, the dog and the tray, which latter the animal showed a desire to bring away with him as a memento, doubtless, of his past life.

The new member of the family was washed, brushed, combed, disinfected, christened Thor, and presented to Kiki, the toy-terrier, whose greeting was not altogether unfriendly, and then to M. Chambreuil, the manufacturer, who had just come home in a very bad temper.

"What dog is this?" he asked Bell. "He has the look of a beggar. Where have you picked him up? People will begin to think that my affairs are in a bad way, and that I am getting ready to take my stand on the Pont des Arts with a clarionet! Choose a fashionable dog and welcome—say, one of Pomeranian or Polish breed, but this verminous, thick-headed thing! And then he has such a doleful expression on him. Well, you never did make friends with the lively sort."

But Bell only replied by a smile of contempt. This coarse-grained man had never understood her. From his childhood he had only reckoned as good

actions those which produce more than five per cent. Why tell him of the adventure which would only make Thor more offensive to him? The dog, at least, tried to show his gratitude; already he licked, without flinching, a hand in which so many scents were intermingled that his nostrils quivered in the desperate attempt to unravel those unaccustomed odours and recognise each for what it was worth.

And at this very hour, as the song has it, Jean Fullemoy was adorning his person for the express purpose of paying a visit to Mme. Chambreuil. He had already creased and abandoned six neckties—a certain symptom of love; he anxiously consulted his glass, which had at first responded optimistically, and then weary of so much introspection, had rendered him almost hopeless by calling to his attention the inevitable imperfections of the human countenance. And yet Jean's might have been pronounced well-nigh perfect, so finely chiselled, so winning in all the candid freshness of eighteen.

While with the finger and thumb he was still emphasising the waviness of his hair over the forehead, M. Fullemoy *père* came into the dressing-room. "Ah," he growled, "you are titivating yourself, are you, my lad? It's some ladybird you're after, I'll bet!"

M. Fullemoy, in the far-off time when he was slim and short of cash, had affected an aristocratic manner. Wealth had engendered in him a vulgar tone which he could not shake off, and which amounted in his case to a sort of eccentricity; no one, however, remarked it, as he had acquired

with years a thick physical conformation quite in keeping with his style of expressing himself.

"Some ladybird, eh?" repeated this vulgar parent.

"I am going to pay a visit," admitted Jean.

"Yes, yes; I can see that. Well, just attend to what I say, boy. You are young; you are having your fling; good! I allow you fifteen louis a month; at your age, I hadn't more than fifteen francs, and I got my fun till I was fed up with it. We dined in tea-shops; yes, my lord, and danced in publichouses. But as for you, you seem to be running after women in society. Distrust them..."

"But, father..."

"They will make you believe they are smitten with you, and let you in at long last. They know you are the son of papa, and one day or another they will send you in the bill. You will do me the justice to remember that I lived before you were born or thought of. Don't take that superior air with me: at the root of things you are hardly as clever as you think, and you will let yourself be bowled over."

"But surely, father, there are disinterested women in society..."

"Yes, but only the straight ones. Where are you going?"

Jean was ready with a lie.

"To Mme. Destonnes, the solicitor's wife," he answered.

"That's all right; she's sixty. But I tell you again, distrust the other sort; you'll get the bill in the end, and laid on stiff, too."

Shocked at his parent's vulgarity, but a good deal impressed by what he had said, Jean betook himself

to Mme. Chambreuil's. As he rang at the door, he dismissed all his suspicions. How attribute calculated self-interest to an ethereal creature compact with grace, tenderness, and melancholy charm? And then Chambreuil was rich, and denied his wife nothing she could desire.

It was pure, romantic sympathy—he felt sure of it—that had made Bell gently press his hand when he had sighed over her drooping head: "I am very unhappy on your account." He found her alone; she was reading a book represented, in this case, by a price list of novelties, at the corner of a fire represented by a radiator. The scenery is always shifting, but souls remain unchanged. When Jean entered, Bell looked up with rather a bewildered expression, that of one waking from a brown study.

"It is you?" said she.

He replied simply and with much truth:

"It is I."

M. Chambreuil had just gone out with such symptoms of apoplectic fury that a wife with a criminal imagination might have wished them a happy ending. Thor was dining in the kitchen. Bell was softened, if one might say so, by her recent act of charity. She felt so saturated with benevolence that she was sorry there was no one to reap the benefit of it. Young Fullemoy had the best of luck and the best of chances: he was there at the psychological moment. She was amused at finding him so timid and bashful.

"Sit down," she said, adopting the tone of the coquette of comedy. "Are you always so dejected?"

Then did Jean pour out his soul. While he spoke



of his sufferings, Bell's hand allured him. He seized it, that hand of surpassing delicacy, and kept it within his for a few moments, then pressed it fervently, and at last covered it with kisses. If Bell had said "This is madness!" he would have taken flight, overwhelmed with shame. If she had said "Be prudent!" he would have remained. Bell said nothing—but offered her lips. Literature, which is the friend of procrastination, gradual developments and tediousness generally, and which expatiates upon instinct, that well-worn topic, and the flowery paths of love, had not prepared Jean either for defeat or victory of such an abrupt nature. He was astonished—and enraptured.

"What is to become of us now?" murmured Bell . . . "What have I done? I would die rather . . ."

"No, no, I implore you!" faltered Fullemoy, who was a novice.

"Go, my friend, go," she cried; "I must have time to reflect. Come to-morrow at the same hour. I will think over what your love really means to you; I must be something more to you than a passing fancy. The question I ask myself is—are you worthy of my love; how will you repay what I grant . . .?"

And she covered her pretty head with her hands, quite overpowered. Jean, not knowing what to say, touched her hair discreetly with his lips, as if to signify that he deprecated her doubts and fears. Then he left her. There was no servant in the hall. The young man, feverish with excitement, was carefully wrapping his throat in his muffler, for he was afraid of catching cold, when a sound made him start. What he saw was imprinted on his



memory for life, never to be obliterated. There, before the door, sat a poodle on its hind legs, a cup in its mouth, begging.

He was afraid of the conviction that was forcing itself upon him . . . His father's words leapt to his mind : " They will make you believe they are smitten with you . . . they will send you in the bill," etc. The begging dog was not posted there for nothing. Ah, he was beginning to understand these women in society ! Had she not said : " I will think over what your love may amount to ! " Flushing with indignation, he felt in his pockets, found himself in possession of six louis, and placed them in the cup. " I am well out of it, anyhow," he thought. " Who knows what it would amount to later on ? " . . . Thor wagged his tail, put down his paws, and stole cautiously to the drawing-room. He had been well trained, there could be no doubt about it !

Bell never understood how it was that her dog brought her one hundred and twenty francs, or why Jean avoided her so carefully from that hour. As for young Fullemoy, he has now a great admiration for his father, and affects the superior and enlightened smile of one who comprehends the fragile texture of illusions, the venality of women, and the vanity of love.



## X

### THE FEZ

NISSIM remembered that he had once been a Turk, chiefly because, long ago, with a fez on his head he used to walk the pavement outside the cafés selling snow-white rahat-loukoum and chunks of nougat, where the almonds looked like yellow teeth set awry in discoloured gums. Happy, care-free days of juvenile commerce! Armed with a platter of highly-burnished copper and a damascened spoon, he had wandered through the world, beguiling the frau, the miss, the señora, teaching them the insipid delights of his sugary wares—and of other things, as opportunity presented itself. Serious, too, in spite of his perpetual smile, and the engaging twinkle in his eyes. And with all the more respect for the authorities because he had no civil status, was not even sure where he came from. Hunger had driven him when he was quite a child away from the hovel where too many lousy little brothers and sisters with ringworm had scrambled about in the dust. But now he had realised his ambition, and was in Paris; his hair was turning grey, as also his big moustache; he spoke a

weird language composed of the slang of every country through which he had wandered ; but it was softened by a natal accent giving a song-like effect to all he said.

And he explored the terraces of the Parisian cafés with a queer old top-hat on his head ; his frock coat and trousers were brown, and he wore a big white necktie, patent boots, and an air of jovial dignity like that of the notary of vaudeville. He carried in his hand a sample-box, one of those used by jewellers' travellers, in which were rings with three pearls set trefoil-fashion, and a diamond in the middle to represent a drop of dew, souvenir-brooches, and out-of-date medallions. And every pocket concealed a watch with a double case, which he would open and turn about before the dazzled client.

“ Better than gold, monsié.”

And if “monsié” betrayed the least interest, he would deliberately take a chair, sit down, and open his box with a “Phuuv !” that suggested he had wonders to reveal ; nor would he spare the hoped-for client the inspection of one single compartment. He exhibited his trinkets with grace ; his hand stretched like a pigeon's wing as he placed a brooch on madame's neck, or slipped a ring on her finger, nor did he forget to take from his pocket, by way of interlude, the plain watch suitable for an ordinary person, or the splendid chronometer fit for a gallant with an enamel picture on the back showing a lady of Montmartre enjoying a bottle of champagne.

“ That, that all what is very best, monsié.”

At midnight he would return to his room on the sixth floor in the rue du Helder, for he had at last

succeeded in making a little fatherland for himself near the boulevards where he gained his living, In the summer, during the dead season, he remained there, showing his wares, just for the pleasure of doing it, to the municipal water-cart man, to the flower-sellers, to the police.

He knew nobody except Bichon, Mademoiselle Bichon of the café concerts, who came sometimes to see him when she was in need of money. A terrible Bichon, somewhere about forty, more plastered with powder than the rahat-loukoun, but infinitely less sweet. He adored her, and watched her with fear, for she did not scruple to help herself from his sample-case, taking from it a ring, a brooch, a chain, just as she would pluck grapes from a bunch on a plate. For eighteen years she had crushed him with her reproaches, threats, cruelties, lies and betrayals. He had given her a key of his room, and she came whenever she liked. The concierge would warn Nissim :

“Go up quickly. Your Camel is waiting for you.”

And Nissim was so conciliating, so amiable, so anxious to please everyone—the habit of his trade—he would sometimes ask his door-keeper :

“Monsieur Parentier, has not Madame my Camel ask for me ? ”

But as soon as he had opened his door, he would stoop down to murmur to Bichon, huddled up in an uneasy doze.

“It is me, my dove, do not be disturbed.”

Over and over again she had bidden him a last good-bye with a fierce joy, setting out for tours that were supposed to bring her money and fame, but from which she returned still thinner and more

evil-tempered, her hair limp, her mouth bitter because she had sung to a chorus of insults. He would bow his head, overjoyed to see her again, the slave of his love—he who came of a race where the women are slaves—bewitched by this vixen, whose feet he kissed with devotion, letting her rob him without protest, torture him without a word of complaint. All that was beautiful seemed to resemble her, from the goddesses on his brooches to the dancers in enamel drinking champagne on the back of his best watches.

One night on returning home he found her in bed, and trembled with joy. He had believed her lost, far away in some remote part of Europe, and here she was back from a three-weeks' stay in Orleans.

She received his expression of joy with a question :  
“ What the devil are you doing here ? ”

He started, taken aback by the question. She explained :

“ I'm asking what the devil you are doing here while your brothers are all out there fighting ? ”

He tried to take it as a joke.

“ Ah ! the war ? I too old, my dove, and all that is politics ; me, I sell my little jewellery ; I not think of other things . . . ”

“ Are you a Turk ? Yes or no ? ”

“ I not a Turk. I seller of jewellery.”

“ Then you don't read the papers ? ”

He shook his head. The papers cost money, and besides he hardly could read at all. In any case, this sort of conversation had no interest for him ; he wanted to find Bichon in the kindly mood which sometimes preluded a request for a hat or a pair of boots. But she insisted :

“ But where do you come from ? ”

He reflected. It was so long since he had left his birthplace. Finally he pronounced a name, barbarous and soft of sound. In that far-off land there was sunshine and blue sky, but so much poverty, so much misery. He imagined himself back there, running about in a dirty shirt and scrambling among the dogs for food.

“ They never hurt me . . . I liked them . . . Once I cried. The mother-dogs had put their puppies safe in a hole in a big dust-heap . . . and the big rain came, and all the little dogs were drowned. We not have toys there ; we play with what we found. So we play with the little dead dogs, but we cried, and cried . . . ”

He shook himself and squared his shoulders. What connection could there possibly be between that starved urchin and this gentleman-peddler, with his case of jewellery, his frock-coat, his high hat, the real tradesman that he had become, living in rue du Helder, surrounded by his own furniture, and with a magnificent sweetheart with yellow hair ?

“ Kiss Nissim and not talk politics,” he urged. “ Not like to talk of poor beggars . . . ”

“ You’d shake with fright if they made you go and fight ! How old are you ? ”

He made a vague gesture. He didn’t know. He didn’t know anything about himself. He was Nissim, and that was all. He used to sell sweetmeats out in the big world ; now he was tired, hungering for cossetings and rest ; he thought of nothing but his trade and Bichon. She must not ask too much of him. ° He tapped his forehead with his fist.



"An old animal, my dove; Nissim, an old, old animal who loves you . . ."

But to-night his cajoleries were without effect; his smile had lost its brilliance, and his eyes, the eyes dimmed by the electric glare of cafés, wearied by having implored attention from too many people, begged instead of fascinating.

"You don't even know that your country is at war. Wait a minute!"

She got up. Her face wore its expression of bad days, and her movements had the quickness that only came when she was on the point of playing one of her worst tricks.

"I've brought you the papers; I'm going to read them to you."

Resigning himself to this incomprehensible caprice, he sat down, his hat still on his head, his sample-case on his knees, his elbows pressed close to his sides, so that he could protect the watches if she pushed violently against him. She picked up some newspapers she had brought, and spread them out on the table.

"They're getting it hot; your Turks! Wait a moment and you'll see."

He looked at her uneasily—surely it would have been better to lie down and fall happily asleep, thinking of nothing but each other. But she kept to her idea, and began to read. An immense respect for her took possession of him as he listened, the respect of the ignorant for those who can read. How clever she was, this Bichon! And what a pretty voice she had . . .

Then, all of a sudden, he understood. It was the account of a terrible defeat: rifles thrown away in heaps, death, terror, the cholera, hunger, above all,

hunger, the Turkish hunger that he had known. And at the recollection his stomach turned.

"They're getting it hot! They're getting it hot!" repeated Bichon with frenzied joy.

Corpses . . . prisoners . . . no alleviation for the agony of the wounded; Death without Glory. The names of the towns taken one by one touched some vague note of remembrance in the awakening brain of Nissim. He had heard those names before, long ago; he repeated them to himself under his breath: "Bonnar Hissar . . . Karagetch . . . Viza . . ."

When she had finished, Bichon raised her head. Nissim still had his case on his knees, but he was trembling convulsively. Never had Bichon seen a man tremble like that. It almost alarmed her.

"Are you ill?"

He trembled still more violently. She was beginning to laugh scornfully:

"Oh! Mountebanks like you . . ."

But Nissim was standing, drawn up to his full height before her, and suddenly fear seized her. Up in his little room on the sixth floor of the rue du Helder, Nissim had in a flash become filled with the poignant distress, the impotent rage, of the vanquished who had fallen in that distant land. But he was so young when he left his country. Hadn't he said so himself just now? He didn't remember anything at all about it; he had said it was "all politics." But she saw she had made a mistake. She ought not to have spoken like that; it would have been better to have gone to bed at once, not to have brought up such a distressing subject. And she asked him to forgive her for

having laughed. But he pushed her hat and dress towards her.

“Quick! Quick! Get out!”

Panic-stricken, she dressed in haste. In five minutes the old idiot had relapsed into a Turk! He was throwing her out as he would have thrown her out of a harem. . . . She fled, banging the door behind her with an oath.

Nissim was alone. He rummaged in a trunk, and got out his fez, the fez he wore when he sold rahat-loukoum and nougat. It was all moth-eaten, but he threw his high hat aside, and put it on his head. Then, some irresistible force made him bow his head; words, soft and barbarous, rose to his lips, words he had used as a little child, full of sunshine, of odours, and of suffering, words of whose meaning he knew nothing except that they formed a prayer.

And he fell on his knees sobbing . . . his face turned towards Mecca.

## XI

### THE AT-HOME DAY

AT nine o'clock Luchardon was ready. He had chosen for the fancy-dress ball at the Mihys a cheaply-dressed and ludicrous character: it was represented by a sugar-loaf hat, a robe of green cloth adorned with a pair of scissors in gilt paper, and lastly a placard hanging over his chest on which was written: "I am a dervish."

"Marie," he called, "can I come in?"

Without waiting for an answer, he entered the bedroom. Mme. Luchardon was pinning a bunch of violets in her bodice. The dervish expressed his admiration at the sight of her by a grin which spread over his smooth, ochre-smeared countenance.

"You are charming beyond words," he said, astonished.

And in truth his young wife had never looked so pretty. Dressed as a milkmaid, she wore a short frock of shot silk, a neckerchief cut point-wise, and a lace cap; finely-proportioned and slender, with the traditional beauty spot at the corner of her mouth, with sparkling eyes, she laughed gaily, as might an escaped prisoner. For really, thanks to this

costume, Marie Luchardon, the wife of a humble supernumerary, no longer existed; it seemed to her almost as if she were leaving for ever the dingy little flat where her life had seemed so drab.

"My legs are a little in evidence, but they are not so very hideous, eh? And my feet—do you think those shoes with the pompons suit them? Ah, well, Casimir, I shall have to become modest again to-morrow . . . I am another being now; if you only knew how happy I feel! . . ."

"I feel rather ashamed of myself," sighed Luchardon. "I fancy I'm not going to be very funny in my funny dress."

"You are all right," replied Marie airily; "nothing is more stupid than a solemn-looking costume for a man. The worst of it is that you haven't an opera-cloak."

"But, my dear love," said Casimir, "this ball is of no importance; light refreshments, and the company—Blique, the accountant's clerk, who only gets eighteen hundred francs a year, and Mme. Blique, have hired dresses at a second-hand clothes shop! It will smell of benzine, this little night out! Ah, I should like to take you to some swell affair, where you would still be queen of them all!"

Mme. Luchardon enjoined silence by a shrug of the shoulder; but there did seem to be some occasion for disillusioning her. She had dressed with scrupulous care, and seemed to forget that the assemblage would consist of humble clerks and their wives—a paltry ball, truly, to the tune of a jingling piano hammered out by a lady performer at a hundred sous the evening.

"Madame, the carriage is waiting!" And Marie glances round her, as if saying good-bye to the room

of which she used to be fond, and which seems all of a sudden to have grown shabby ; good-bye to the spaniel Faust, who sulks, curled up in a ball in the darkest corner of the kitchen ; good-bye to her boy Tonton, who has the insignificant nose of his father, and who, in his little cot, snores the snore of a man . . .

The sound of a waltz lends enchantment to the staircase of the Mihys, and Marie experiences a singular flutter of spirits such as that which, she imagines, must agitate the young ladies of fashion on their début at a real ball. What reaches her ear as she goes up, preceding her husband, who is attempting an imitation of the dervish's falsetto, is the buzz of a very commonplace gathering, but all the same it has the murmur and the scented stir of pleasure . . .

"Isn't she sweet? Oh, a perfect gem. It's meant for a marchioness, isn't it? No? Oh, a milkmaid! Well, she'll get plenty of customers! And Luchardon's priceless! He'll be the death of me, that creature! Amélie, look at the scissors! She doesn't understand! Wait a moment: I'll arrange an entry for him. Madame Pianist, 'The Turkish March,' please!"

M. Mihi is painful to behold. He is arrayed in an old dressing-gown of his wife's, is embellished with a false nose filled with snuff, has a portress's bandana handkerchief on his head, and chews an unlighted cigar . . .

Yes, Marie Luchardon is queen of them all. And these ladies suddenly discover she is very proud, very haughty, with her distant airs . . . It is not her fault: she feels all at once that she is isolated, different from the others, belonging to

another race. Never have they seemed to her so plain, so commonplace . . . A harridan of sixty, dressed as an Oriental dancing girl, shamelessly parades her sticks of legs and bust of parchment ; a big, shaggy man, supposed to be a wrestler, is content to enact the part in tricolour tights : lamentable musketeers bring to mind the drunken excesses of Carnival, and lean, unpaired spinsters suggest the desolation of draggled triumphal chairs in the rain at mid-Lent. And this is the pleasure to which she has so long looked forward, and for which all the household savings have been expended ! Blique, as Schaunard, resplendent in a waistcoat which is too tight for him, asks her for a waltz, and is curtly refused : " I am too old, and then you do not Boston ! " But Mme. Mihy, encircled by a lamp-shade of rose-tinted, crinkled paper, advances solemnly, saying :

" My dear, let me introduce Lucien Dondigneulles, our solicitor."

He is a charming person, this M. Dondigneulles, with his scarlet, perfectly-fitting coat, his white waistcoat, his black silk breeches, to say nothing of his fair moustache, his smiling looks, and the easy grace of his every movement. Beneath his spell Marie feels herself weak, confused, fascinated. Some secret, sleeping impulse is awakened within her. She has a sense of defeat, of being conquered.

" Monsieur, pray excuse me . . . "

" What, Madame ! You desert me already . . . No . . . I ask you, I beg of you to stay ; if you don't, I shall go, and that will annoy the Mihys . . . "

He goes on talking, amuses her with trivialities. And Marie listens as she has never listened to human accents . . . She had a presentiment that some



strange thing would come into her life to-night ; there are moments when the most unbending virtue feels the attraction of romance. A waltz . . . she rises ; he carries her off. She has no will of her own now ; she tries in vain to assert it ; it is impossible to resist the seductive languor that overcomes her ; every movement of this stranger is a caress. He draws her towards him very gently, respectfully—and she blushes beneath that delicate pressure. He goes on talking ; then he becomes silent, for he feels that she is trembling ; he is conscious of a yielding, of a thrill, intense, acute, profound, such as he has known in no other woman ; he reads in her eyes a pleading, a fear, a joy ; she murmurs at length : “ No more . . . I implore you . . . no more ! . . . ” For some moments they have waltzed alone ; the others have stopped to watch them . . . and under the ochre that bedaubs his face, the dervish has turned pale . . .

In spite of much experience, Lucien Dondigneulles is embarrassed by this sudden conquest. To what motives of revenge, to what disillusion must this precipitate abandonment be ascribed ? But the solicitor has never let a good chance escape him. He believed he would be dreadfully bored, and here he is being amused. And Marie is not without charm for him—a little unpolished perhaps, but a real little gem.

“ You are fond of sport, Madame ? And you go to the theatre ? ”

“ Yes, Monsieur . . . ”

Her chief sport has been scrubbing floors. And in the matter of theatres, Casimir takes her occasionally to some antiquated comic opera, because he likes to hum the tunes in time with the

performers ; and when those near him object, he retorts : " I have paid for my seat as well as you ! " But it is an evening of illusions. And now Lucien begins to whisper tender words, stealthily takes her hand in his, and she responds with a little squeeze. A sort of entrancement overwhelms her ; the voice she hears is not her own voice, that hysterical laugh is strange to her. He affects to be interested in ordinary conversation ; then he bends over her, and she imagines she hears those words of flame and sweetness : " I love you ! "

At a little distance, at an open door, the dervish is making pathetic little signs. Can he be her husband, that buffoon, with the sugar-loaf hat, the green dress and placard ?

" What does he want with you, that fellow ? " laughs Lucien. " Perhaps you have noticed that the uglier people are, the uglier they try to make themselves. It is sickening ! "

She nods assent. What does anything matter so long as she can keep within this circle of enchantment ! . . .

" Do let me see you soon," whispers the solicitor ; " tell me quickly, have you a day ? " . . .

A day ? A day for receiving ? No, Marie has not. But she pretends she has :

" Yes, certainly ; Wednesdays."

" Then I will come soon . . . I must see you again . . . "

She rises, hastens to the smoking-room where Casimir is waiting for her :

" Let us go, let us go at once," she orders. .

And they go back to a home that seems gloomier than ever.

For four Wednesdays she waited eagerly, but there

was no sign of Dondigneulles. He had a capricious mistress, who took up all his time. Marie went about in a state of apathy, as if walking in her sleep. Then she began to recover her lost self. At times she would catch up her boy in her arms, and kiss him wildly, passionately. Casimir, much troubled, spoke often of Lucien, as "that gay young spark, who made love to you, I warrant."

One fine day the solicitor, having been insulted by his mistress, thought of the humble little beauty who had responded so flatteringly to his advances. He had nothing better to do; he found himself before the house; he would call on her. Only he had forgotten the day; this was Tuesday. A servant-girl with a scared look opened the door, left him in the hall, then showed him into the parlour.

"Madame is dressing. She will be ready in a few minutes."

Lucien looked about him, puzzled by the cheap ornamental clock, the poor chintz curtains, the paraffin lamp on its marble pedestal, by the musty atmosphere of a penurious household. If he had known, he would have come less smartly dressed . . . poor little woman!

The door half-opened. It was the dog Faust who came to say good day to the visitor, and who brought, as a token of welcome, a lady's shoe, much dilapidated and with down-trodden heel. Then the door opened a little wider, and Tonton, not very steady on his legs, made his appearance, carrying in his arms something which he showed triumphantly, and which proved to be the chemise of a hard-working woman, a chemise of coarse linen

with little trimming, the like of which Lucien had never set eyes on.

“Ugènie and I mend it,” cried the little fellow.

Dondigneulles was confounded. All this—the clock on the mantelpiece, the piano, the paraffin lamp, the shoe, the chemise—seemed to say to him : “Go away, you have no business here !” He rose, and lightly touched the hair of the urchin with his lips, and in a gentle voice :

“Look here,” he said . . . “I must have made a mistake . . . Take this message from me ; tell your mother that I have gone . . . that I did not wish to inconvenience her . . .”

## XII

### PUBLICITY

M. AND MME. LE HOURDACHE came out from the solicitor's horribly disappointed. All their pleasure was spoiled. The old cousin in Normandy had indeed bequeathed them a large fortune, but it was saddled with the condition of setting aside four thousand francs a year for a couple of ancient retainers.

"The idea of disposing of our money like that," groaned Mme. Le Hourdache. "That's the way with a family like yours—low-class people who have a natural affinity with servants."

"Hélène," expostulated M. Le Hourdache, "you are unjust."

He was a good-looking man of fifty, a Bluebeard addicted to the use of brilliantine. His wife, tall, spare, and dried-up, looked as if she had been cooked twice over in the fires of greed and envy.

"It's twelve o'clock," she remarked. "Where to breakfast is the next thing. It's a quarter of an hour's walk to the hotel. And what mud to wade through! They never sweep the streets, as one might expect, in this delightful town. My dress will be ruined!"

"If only we had come in the car," hazarded Le Hourdache.

She deigned no reply, gathered up her skirts, and set off, red and angry, stumbling over the cobble stones. The motor car was only used to pay visits to people of importance; the manservant rigged himself out in some of his master's old clothes, and a cap with a gold band. The prospect of increased wealth had not availed to make Madame order out the car for so short a distance. The richer they became, the more she studied economy, although she professed a horror of all kinds of business. She, *she* belonged to the professional classes, with judges and magistrates in the family, while her husband's father had acquired a huge fortune, thanks to *Ravigotine*, a liqueur he had invented. In their frequent wrangles she called her husband a publican, although he had passed his life hitherto in a most honourable state of idleness. And they concealed the source of their income as a blemish on their reputation. She boasted of her relations—not one of them connected with trade—superannuated people on the pension-list, regretful of old sinecures, and their wives even more jealous of the sacred order to which they belonged. They held a reception once a week in a drawing-room that smelt of camphor and damp flannel. The dreariest conversations! They showed no sign of animation except when discussing the question of whether so-and-so ought to be received into their circle. The widow of the millionaire had been blackballed, because she continued to manage the establishment of her late husband.

Le Hourdache styled himself a collector, though



what he collected no one had ever quite made out. In the charmed atmosphere of his surroundings, he grew to be ashamed of the father that begot him—a gentleman farmer, so he said, who was remotely connected with business—and of the *Ravigotine*, which had procured him a lifelong holiday. And never did the accursed thing make its appearance on their table.

“Hélène, I can’t keep up with you!”

She condescended to wait for him; more especially as a dog-cart was coming along at a great pace through the narrow street. They had to step aside to avoid being splashed. To their astonishment the gentleman who drove the dog-cart made them a friendly bow.

“Oh, horror!” muttered Mme. Le Hourdache, who had very sharp eyes. “Don’t you see? It’s Nitoux, that vulgar creature I hoped never to see again after our marriage. He has recognised us and stopped. A friend of your father’s—another publican!”

M. Nitoux had, in fact, stopped. He was engaged in quieting his horse, which was restive, and glanced towards the couple, making cheery signals to them, a broad smile on his good-natured, florid face. When they came up he called out:

“By jove, this is a pleasure! Good morning, Monsieur and Madame. Ah, would you, rascal? He’s only a three-year-old, this little firebrand. Well, and what are you doing here? This is a bit of luck and no mistake! I said to myself: ‘Good Lord, there are the Le Hourdaches.’ And how goes it with you? Won’t you get up? You’ll have to squeeze a bit, but that’s better than getting covered with mud!”



Le Hourdache looked at his wife, who hesitated for a moment. The big man continued :

" Yes, get up, now do ! You'll come and have a snack at my place—there's always something going. No formality, you know. You would do the same for me at Paris—only I never go there. Business, business, you see ! "

This last speech turned the scale with H  l  ne. Her husband hoisted her up as well as he could. They packed themselves in, delighted at the prospect of a meal that would cost nothing, and a ride that would save them plodding through the mud. Nitoux was jubilant.

" My good lady will be as pleased as Punch ! Mme. Le Hourdache will tell her all about the latest fashions in Paris. I have also a daughter—ah, devil take the nag !—and a fine young lad. As fresh as apple-blossoms both. Good day, old father Lestivault. One of my tenants. Well ! You're getting shaken up, I see ; but it's good for the liver. I've just been chatting with some customers of mine. We have a glass or so together ; we joke with each other. It's more like a game than business. Ah, confound you ! "

Every time he apostrophised the horse, Mme. le Hourdache gave a start, shocked at the vulgarity of the man. But the prospect of getting a breakfast gratis reconciled her to everything. When they arrived at the house, she assumed a gracious manner towards Mme. Nitoux, whom she took at first for the cook ; towards her daughter Charlotte, whom she took for the parlour-maid, and towards her son, Cyprien, whom she took for the groom. The family inhabited a substantial building, at the back of which were the distillery and shop.

"We will do the honours presently," said Nitoux. "Blanche, take them to your dressing-room to wash their hands. Then we'll have lunch."

When he was alone with his wife, Le Hourdache muttered:

"This is your doing! . . ."

"You don't suppose I'm going to make friends with these people!" she retorted. "But since no one will be any the wiser . . . They don't know anybody connected with us, thank Heaven, so there's no risk of our being compromised. We'll send them a card 'With our compliments and thanks,' and that will be the end of it. At the hotel they would have poisoned us—and not forgotten to charge for it!"

The luncheon was an abundant one. Mme. Nitoux had kept on her apron. Nitoux himself, standing up, helped them to soup in huge ladlefuls. There was a prodigious omelet, a galantine of turkey, hashed mutton, and pâté de foie gras. M. Le Hourdache stuffed himself in silence, his left hand on his beard to protect it from the sauces. There was discussion, successively, of the omelet made with irreproachable eggs, of the turkey much in request, of the hash over which the mistress of the house presided, and lastly of the pâté, the rosy hue of which M. Nitoux poetically compared to the tender flush of a startled nymph. But the wine brought about a discordant note.

"Taste that," said Nitoux to Le Hourdache. "The thorough-bred dog doesn't lose the scent; you ought to know it."

"He doesn't know it at all," interrupted Hélène tartly.

"But his worthy papa . . ."

"His papa?"

"Don't you know his papa sold it?"

"Possibly. It's such a long time ago, we scarcely remember it."

Nitoux did not press the question: he said shortly:

"The Government has spoken, I close the debate."

But later, at dessert, he triumphantly flourished a bottle:

"This is my invention. And I'm going to give you the first taste of it. Charlotte and Cyprien, you see Monsieur and Madame: they are millionaires, thanks to *Ravigotine*. Well, this is *Nitouzine*, which I'm just putting on the market—and we shall see! Try it! Try it! Its essential principle is liquorice. I had influenza, and it cured me!"

"It ended in his getting drunk," explained Mme. Nitoux.

But the inventor let himself go in his panegyric on *Nitouzine*:

"I have spent two hundred thousand francs on advertising it. I want the whole world to hear of nothing else. You will see—I'm going to make it the one topic of the day. Let me help you to some more: it goes down like velvet!"

While he poured out a second glass all round, Cyprien proceeded to photograph the group. All the family became excited. They must pay a visit to the distillery, the cellar, the sale-room.

"Ugh!" ejaculated Mme. Le Hourdache when she found herself in the train opposite her husband. "I can speak of my suffering at last. What savages! We won't even send them a card. Fortunately we shall never hear of them again."

She was mistaken. Eight days afterwards, Le Hourdache was calmly shaving himself when his wife, livid and gasping, rushed in to him. She held in her hand several newspapers all open at the same place. With a trembling finger she pointed to a full sheet advertisement on the last page of each. Le Hourdache started and cut his chin. For he had just seen, enormously enlarged, the scene photographed by the young Cyprien, in which appeared, assembled sociably round the table, Le Hourdache and herself, Hélène, Mme. Nitoux and the youthful Charlotte, at the moment when Nitoux was pouring out the liquor. Beneath were printed the following words in the usual style of a street poster:

## THE PINNACLE OF FAME

A breakfast in the home-circle of the illustrious inventor of *Nitouzine*.

"It's delicious," said his friend Le Hourdache, son of the celebrated inventor of *Ravigotine*.

"It's better than *Ravigotine*!" declared Mme. Le Hourdache.



## XIII

### THE PEARL NECKLACE

As the clock struck nine, Chinette made a sensational entrance into the many-windowed hall where the diners had turned their attention from the sea to a band of Italian guitarists.

"Leopold," she said, "I think you might have risen to meet me!"

"I didn't notice you coming in."

"I made dust enough!"

"Too much, my dear, too much."

And really Chinette was dazzling to behold. There is in the mind of the seaside loungeur a propensity corresponding pretty closely with that of the inhabitants of colleges and prisons: new comers are scrutinised with something of a spiteful curiosity. Chinette and her friend had arrived that day. He was a neutral kind of gentleman in a dress-jacket, but the lady's appearance caused a flutter. As well as a hat of aggressive proportions, a hat which seemed to challenge all comers, and a tulle dress covered with glistening spangles, she had mounted all her jewellery; her hands, twin constellations of starry gems, put one in

mind of those little animals which a barbarian custom of former days tricked out with sapphires, diamonds and rubies; her bodice was adorned with five brooches ranged in a row, as in a jeweller's window, and her excessively low dress was surmounted by a pearl necklace, at which Leopold screwed up his eyes.

"Well, have you finished your examination?" asked Chinette. "You might screw up a smile; I don't want to look as if I am dragging about a victim."

Leopold managed to call up rather a melancholy smile.

"Your necklace . . ." he murmured.

"Well, what of it? Victor-Emmanuel has been pressing it on me these last two years."

"What?"

"Victor-Emmanuel, my ex. He gave it me wrapped in paper. I was going to throw it down; but he kissed me and said . . ."

"Enough of Victor-Emmanuel. You see, my child, at the seaside in winter people dispense with jewels which are so heavy to wear. I have brought a jewel-case, and you can keep it there. Your charms need nothing to set them off, and with such teeth as yours, you want no other pearls."

But Chinette told him in a dry tone he might be sure that flatteries like these were quite beside the mark. She knew perfectly well what was due to herself, and had no notion of being taken for a beggar. While speaking, she verified with a stealthy finger the presence of her jewels; she counted them up to twenty-eight, and began again and again, sometimes finding them too many, sometimes too few. Talking thus, they soon got through dinner,



and rose with the intention of adjourning to the card-room.

"Here are five louis," said Leopold. "You can have the same amount every evening, but that must be the limit. As you don't know how to play and always make mistakes in scoring, I strongly advise you not to hold the bank: I warn you that in the case of error you will have to pay up all round. Another thing: I intend to hold a bank myself: and as that requires the utmost coolness, I must ask you to keep in another part of the room, and not to lean over me and mutter: 'Go on ruining yourself; they are all thieves and sharpers!' as you did last summer."

Chinette shrugged her shoulders, but assented. She took her place at a distant table beside a charming young fellow, who offered her the benefit of his advice. At about midnight she had lost, in addition to Leopold's five louis, three thousand francs of her own. Her cheeks flushed, her palms moist, she searched in her little gold chain bag, but beyond a scrap of a handkerchief, and a stick of rouge, she found nothing there but a sou with a hole in it, and a bad fifty-centime piece. Then she got up from the table, and went and stood beside Leopold, who, seeing her approach, made the sarcastic feint of guarding with both hands a little pile of counters. Chinette, putting her pride in her pocket, tried for a loan, but was severely repulsed.

"You're always a bear when you lose," she cried, to the great amusement of the other players.

Then she returned to her place, and watched with envious and melancholy attention the game in which she had no further interest. Her neighbour, who staked a hundred sous at intervals of a quarter

of an hour, assured her that the luck was going to change, and that it was the critical moment for punting. Nothing was easier than to obtain money here on the spot: M. Fritz, the personification of honesty, was waiting about to lend money on deposits of value and to buy jewellery. The great thing was to be prepared with a sufficiently large sum when it came to the point of doubling the stakes. And M. Fritz came up in the nick of time. He was a slim, closely shaved gentleman of faultless manners, except that he had an unpleasant way of looking round, like a mountebank in some public place on the watch for the approach of the police. Chinette passed with him into a little room that was unoccupied. She took off her necklace; M. Fritz valued it, weighing it in a pair of scales which he carried in his pocket, and lent her twelve thousand francs on it. Amiable and psychologically perceptive to the last, he even presented her, into the bargain, with a necklace of false pearls, which should replace the original one, and which resembled it like a twin brother.

At three in the morning, after various turns of luck, Chinette had nothing left but a fifty-louis note. Leopold, speechless and heavy-eyed, came to find her. Night of disaster . . . The sea seemed to growl of approaching catastrophe . . .

The next day at three o'clock in the afternoon Leopold went into the card-room.

"You had better go out for a walk," he said to Chinette; "I won't have you playing baccarat before evening. I must recoup."

At five o'clock he had not a red cent to bless himself with; he must wire to Paris. He went up into his bedroom, and opened his jewel-case to

see if by chance he had left a coin or two there. Not a sou! But Chinette's jewels glittered before him . . . He would have to wait then until he could try his luck once more. But no! The valet, on being questioned, informed him that M. Fritz, as trustworthy as obliging, lent money on jewels, and bought them if required. And M. Fritz, of the elegant demeanour and suspicious glance, appeared again on the scene.

But—oh, amazement!—that gentleman assured him that the pearl necklace was false, and as Leopold was incredulous, took him to a jeweller's shop, where the fact was corroborated. Ah, Victor-Emmanuel knew with whom he was dealing, and Chinette would hear something if she talked of the brute's generosity again! An hour having passed during these proceedings, and a reply to his wire being nearly due, Leopold took leave of M. Fritz, and returned to his dressing-room, where he donned his dress jacket. He smiled in spite of the fix he was in: "The next time she tries to floor me with her Victor-Emmanuel, by Jove, I'll let her know how she has been tricked."

But he found Chinette in a charming temper. Asked how she had put in her time, she replied that she had gone out on the sea to shoot seagulls. She wore no jewels, but that did not take away her appetite for dinner. As a matter of fact, she had played *baccarat* all the afternoon, and had won fourteen thousand francs. During dessert she went out, redeemed the necklace from the clutches of M. Fritz, put it in the jewel-case, and returned him the false one.

In the evening, Leopold lost his telegraphic remittance in royal fashion. He looked for Chinette

but could not find her, went up into his bedroom, brought down the necklace, and tossed it to M. Fritz, saying: "Take this rubbish, and hand over a couple of louis!"

And now we border on the miraculous. At three in the morning the two louis had been transformed into eight thousand francs. Then a delightful idea came into Leopold's mind: he would buy an authentic necklace of M. Fritz, and so repair the scurvy trick of his predecessor. What a magnanimous revenge when he should say to his charmer: "Compare the way he does things with the way I do them!"

Early in the morning he went in search of M. Fritz, but learned to his surprise that the amiable gentleman had started at break of day for an unknown destination . . .

On his return, Chinette greeted him affectionately:

"So you've come at last, you rascal! Where have you been? What has the little bow-wow been up to away from its Mummie?"

"The little bow-wow," he babbled, "wanted to give its Mummie a surprise. That necklace of yours—I took it away yesterday and had it examined. My dear child, it was false, false as they make them, false as it's possible to be . . ."

"And what then?" gasped Chinette. "What then?"

"Why then, as I was stoney-broke, I pledged it for two louis to a worthy man, who has since taken his departure. But don't you worry yourself. Here are five lovely little thousand-franc notes. I'll buy you another—a real one this time! You won't be a loser after all. And as for me, I have the pleasure of proving to you that your ex, as you call him, is the last word in mean skunks!"

## XIV

### THE REFUGE

MME. SOURCIER made her husband's life a burden to him.

" Benjamin," she used to say, even (and preferably) before a numerous audience, " Benjamin has no more sense than a new-born babe, and is much more trouble. If I were not there, I believe, God forgive me for saying it, that he would never change his shirt, and would wash his face about twice a year. Isn't it true, Benjamin ? "

And Benjamin would reply humbly :

" Yes, Clara."

He was a little man, whose disproportionately large head was covered by a river of beard and a cataract of hair. At the time of his engagement to Clara, he was making a bare livelihood by copying pictures at the Louvre, and the lady, rich and almost offensively plain, had been captivated by this artist-owner of a prophet's head. He had soon repented of his surrender. The most heroic caresses failed to soften his scarecrow of a bride, who would interrupt the warmest moments of endearment with some such remark as this :

“Did you brush your black coat when you came in? No? Well, go and brush it now—perhaps another time you’ll remember.”

She allowed him fifty centimes a day as pocket-money, treated him as an idiot when she was in a bad temper, and called him Bibi as a pseudonym of contempt. And Sourcier had a terrible time. There was nowhere to take cover. At six in the morning, his wife, fully dressed and furiously busy, began to frighten the echoes with her clamour. With her three or four hairs drawn up and bunched over her head into a sort of Polynesian knot, her straight teeth projecting from her mouth, as if driven out by the violence of her shrill tongue, lank and skinny, dry and yellow—washing, drying, vociferating without pause, Mme. Sourcier, in a tremble of insatiable wrath, drove her husband from room to room; and after twenty years of married life, she still accused him, with the same viciousness, of the same little delinquencies.

Eventually he conceived an ambition.

At the age of fifty-seven one’s ambitions are apt to be modest. That of Benjamin was summed up in one desire: to possess in some peaceful region a sunny room where he might be allowed to live by himself, and to complete at leisure a series of water-colours he had commenced, and in which he strove to find in the extravagance of his scenes some compensation for the monotony of his existence. They were in truth extraordinary pictures, ingenuous in their minute details; women in grotesque postures looked like fantastic flowers; dogs suggested crocodiles; roses, cauliflowers; the ladies, always nude, had disconcerting smiles, velvet eyes, an alluring curve of hip and leg.



"The paintings of a madman," was Mme. Sourcier's verdict.

She lessened day by day the allowance that went to the purchase of pencils, paper and colour-tubes. At last, considering herself outraged by these buxom, voluptuous, smiling goddesses, she took the course of throwing them, at regular intervals, into the fire in winter, into the slop-pail in summer.

Then, Sourcier began to hate her. Not daring to rebel openly, he darted venomous glances at her, and tried to get away from the domestic hearth as much as possible. He went to a little café in the neighbourhood, but the seats were too high for him, and his feet dangled over the floor; he felt ashamed, and never went again. Besides, the forty centimes for coffee cut him off his tobacco. He visited the picture-galleries; but he had copied too many masterpieces, and had come to look on great pictures as tasks. He was reduced to staying at home again, where his wife scolded him worse than ever. The cup of his tribulations ran over on the morning when Frederic Lacloque-Genivret, an Académician and an old fellow-student of Benjamin's, came to lunch with them. At dessert, Clara went out and fetched the last productions of her husband.

"As an artist," she asked, "what do you think of these?"

Lacloque-Genivret adjusted his eyeglass.

"They are," he said, "speaking impartially, the productions of a lunatic. To judge by the salacious and exaggerated curve by which he has emphasised certain parts of his impossible figures, I should say that the author ought to be classed as a sexual degenerate. The disproportion in



matters of detail—just look at this blade of grass, as big as a tree-trunk—inclines me rather to set him down as a megalomaniac.”

When the painter had gone, Mme. Sourcier exulted loudly. She seized an armful of the water-colours and flung them away, executing, at the same time, a sort of war-dance.

“And do you think I’m going to continue to ruin myself in paper and colours for these monstrosities? Not me, my friend! This time you can’t say that I am unjust: your own friend, an Académician, pronounces them to be the work of a madman—you understand, a madman!”

The repetition of this word inspired Benjamin with a sudden idea. How came he never to have thought of it before? Why, it would be his salvation . . .

“Clara,” he began quietly, “there’s something I want to tell you.”

“Well, go on. What are you waiting for?”

“I am not mad. I am the soul of Beethoven.”

“What!”

“I am the soul of Beethoven. I weave my pictures out of fiddle-strings, and the sounds that fall from my lips are spun into the music of angels. Trou-la-la-tou . . . Gaze earnestly at my breast; you will discern there the Star of the Legion of Honour inlaid with serpent-fangs upon a field of peonies; I have star-tears at the ends of my fingers, and my feet move among the clouds. Dzim! V’lan! Bow down all to the wise man of the Revolution: he cures colds with cigarette-papers . . .”

Without waiting to hear the end of this incoherent harangue, Clara rushed out, terrified. When she returned, she found the cook and the housemaid

on the landing. "Madame," they explained, "we dare not go in on account of Monsieur. . . . He is in the dining-room . . ."

He was indeed there, small but statuesque, clothed only in his beard, and waving a Malay dagger, which he had unhooked from a trophy of arms.

"Down on your knees, shameless woman!" he commanded. "Your last hour has come; I am going to pull out all your teeth, and then behead you!"

"Put on your clothes directly," rejoined the shameless woman, trying to frighten him, "or I swear, Benjamin, you'll be sorry for it!"

But Benjamin refused to be intimidated, and persisted in his insane demonstrations. Would they not lead to his imprisonment; that is to say, to his freedom? Far away, separated for ever from his wife, he would have a little room all to himself in one of those homes untroubled by the rest of mankind, and surrounded by a park. There he would pass delightful hours, painting and smoking, undisturbed by conjugal naggings. The society of the insane does not daunt a philosopher, who sees men as they really are.

He acted so outrageously and so cleverly that after a brief medical examination, he was removed to the sanatorium superintended by Doctor Blique, where he found, as he had hoped, a pleasant garden, a cheerful, bright room of his own, a work-table, and a chair admirably adapted for lounging. Refreshed by a shower bath, he thought it unnecessary to continue to act in this tiring way, and he simply declared to the doctor that he was the greatest artistic genius of the age, which he pro-

foundly believed himself to be. From this, the specialist saw at once that his case was hopeless.

He soon made friends among the patients. One of them believed himself to be water on certain days, and crystal on others. Always in fear either of being broken or of drowning his neighbours, the good creature proved to be a quiet and equable companion. Sourcier was on terms of intimacy with a Messiah, and was taken into the confidence of the fairy Urgèle, who was seventy-seven years of age. What blessed peace! As he bent over his canvases, he congratulated himself on his ingenious scheme. Not only could he work in peace, he enjoyed the retirement so dear to artists desirous of giving to the world before their death the full measure of their genius. When he felt in low spirits, he had only to read the newspaper, or to call up memories of Mme. Sourcier, and all his cheerfulness immediately returned.

Eleven months had slipped away in the bosom of this blessed sanctuary, where by their very illusions the prisoners are free, when one morning the doctor came into his room.

"I am not disturbing you?" he asked politely. "One finds you always at work—magnificent!"

"Doctor," interrupted Sourcier, a little alarmed at this visit, and wishing to confirm him in his diagnosis, "Doctor, I am the greatest genius upon earth . . ."

"That's well known; but I have come to bring you a wonderful piece of news . . . Prepare yourself for a great happiness . . . Your wife is about to be admitted into the asylum; she will be close to you, in the next room; she is coming as a patient, and will never leave you again. Her

nerves are much shaken, and she is in great need of rest."

And while the astounded Sourcier was asking himself whether he really had gone mad, the doctor opened the door, and Mme. Sourcier entered, an entirely new Mme. Sourcier, priestess-like, with raised eyebrows and puckered lips, and holding in her hand, as it might be a lily, an unlit candle.

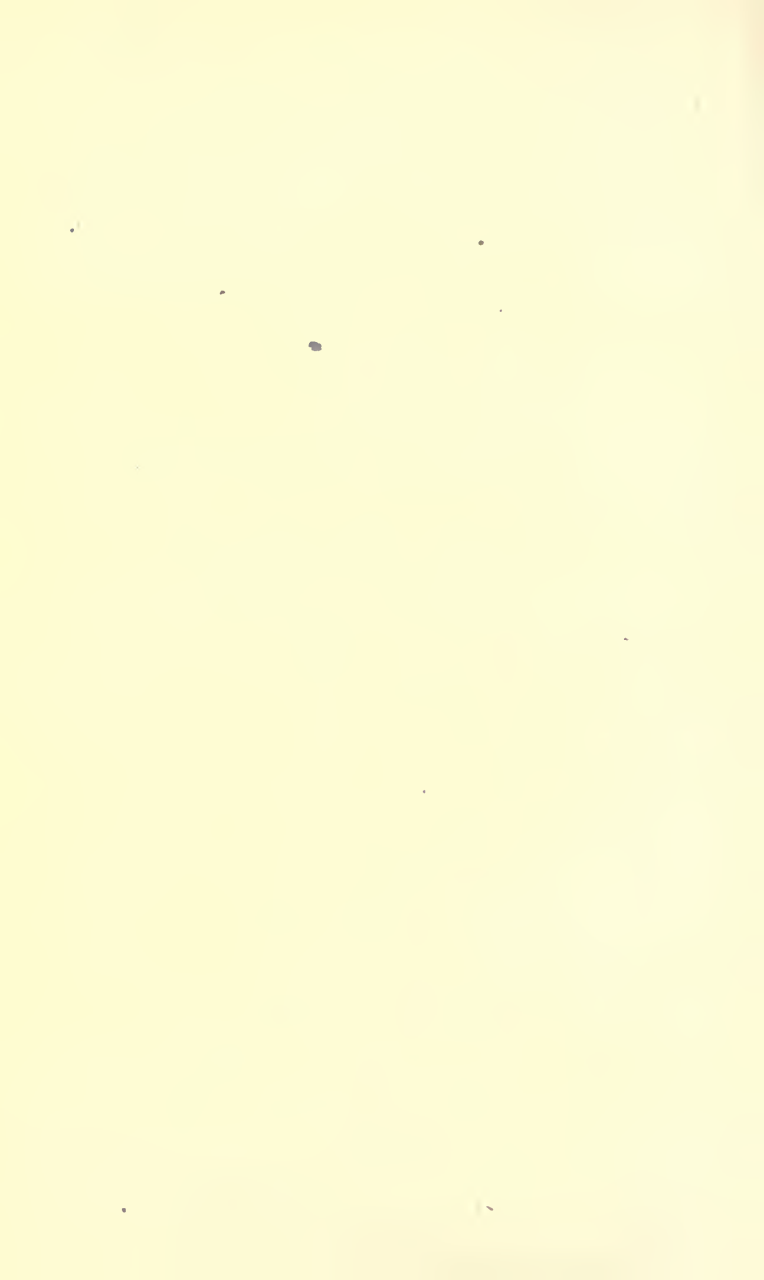
"I will leave you," said Doctor Blique.

When he had gone, Mme. Sourcier put down the taper and resumed her natural expression.

"Is it a lucid moment with you?" she asked her husband. "Can you understand what I say?"

"Yes, yes, what does it all mean?" gasped the wretched man.

"Don't be alarmed. I am not mad at all. I only wanted to get shut up here. I found I could not get on without you, my Bibi!"



## XV

### “GENTLE SLEEP”

MADAME GOBERNEUR was admiring herself.

The Salnaves were giving a fancy head-dress ball, and she had chosen a love of an 1830 bonnet, yellow, lined with green, with green feather and strings. Her hair was dressed in smooth bandeaux; from her ears hung long golden pear-shaped drops, and she had just drawn on the filmiest pair of mittens, and fastened a black velvet band on her left arm. Her dress was a narrow, yellow silk skirt, the bodice chastely décolletée; as jewellery, a cameo brooch of the day, which showed a weeping willow and a kneeling woman; white stockings, bronze shoes, and a reticule embroidered in gaudy beads.

She inspected herself critically in the glass, and smiled with an air of indulgent melancholy that meant: “I’d be prettier still if only I were happy.”

Then she bethought herself of her husband. A voice was saying softly: “Toc! toc!”

“It’s you? Come in,” she said.

M. Gouverneur had kept his disguise a secret so

as to surprise his wife. She did not at once turn round, and he bleated :

"Mummy's little darling! Mummy dear!"

Then she beheld him. Horror! Turning to account his round face, fresh complexion and curly fair hair, M. Gouverneur had stuck on his head an old-fashioned baby's hat, straw with a big blue tassel on top, and in place of a collar he wore a bib with "Baby is Good" embroidered in red.

"You are not going to the dance like that?" moaned Mme. Gouverneur.

"I knew it!" replied the obese baby. "You never will be a real Parisienne. No doubt you would prefer to have me rigged out as a musketeer, a harlequin, or a sweet little Henry II. What I wanted was a dress that would make everybody laugh. Look, I got a baby's bottle, and I am going to fill it with champagne, then, on with the fun! The Salnaves look to me to make things hum. Every time they slow down, you'll hear me call: 'Mummy, Mummy!' You don't half know me; you've never seen me carrying on at Montmartre. Ah! when I was a young fellow I never went to bed till daylight, and sometimes not then. Ready to go?"

"It's only half-past nine; we shall start at eleven."

"Right you are: we must be noticed when we arrive. In that case, Marie, I shall lie down on the sofa and have a doze."

In a few moments the sofa gave out the dull squeak, which told Mme. Gouverneur, at the other end of the room, that her husband was preparing to go to sleep. Sleep—he was in the habit of rising late, and having a good two hours' siesta after luncheon,



waking with his hair tousled, his mouth gummy, and the expression of a man brutally aroused from slumber. He slept in omnibuses, in carriages, no matter where, after the manner, he was wont to say, of Napoleon I. He never snored, but his cheeks swelled, and he mumbled softly, with a scarcely perceptible sound of the lips: "Bsh, bsh, bsh." On that first night, the wedding night, on which depends, psychologists say, the whole of the future of the newly-married pair, it had been "Bsh, bsh, bsh." In the morning, in spite of the glory of the Bay of Naples, outspread in a glow of sunshine and azure, again "Bsh, bsh, bsh." This heavy sleeping had given him a corporation and puffed eyelids. In society, when men strove to shine, Mme. Gouverneur's practised ear caught coming from a corner of the room, or from an armchair, a couch or a sofa, a timid "Bsh, bsh, bsh," to which she replied with a fierce, "Léon!" And he would answer, his lips still indistinctly murmuring: "All right; what did you say?"

For an hour and a half did the fair lady in the costume of 1830, with her widespreading bonnet, her mittens and her reticule, wait; her glance, dark, hard, vague. She could see only the rosy brow of the sleeper, the baby's cap with its blue tassel, and the bib. And it was one of those days when every novel one has ever read comes singing back in one's memory. She thought how pleasant it would have been to be on the way to the ball with some one of whom she could have been really proud.

Then into a hideous cab. This particular one, selected from a score of others by an evil-minded servant, was drawn by a sorry brute that went limping along the boulevard Malesherbes and the

quays, and stopped, as if on the point of giving up the ghost, in the cold street where the Salnaves' mansion showed its ancient façade overlaid with electric lights.

"Here we are, Léon."

"Not yet . . ."

"I tell you we have arrived. Do wake up, Léon! Did anyone ever know such a man!"

"I'm all right, bright as a button; you shall see."

And, in truth, he did his best to play his part well. As he entered, he imitated the uncertain walk of a tiny child, stumbling along on weak and bent legs. But people did not laugh. They turned away, for they had almost all chosen the serious costumes that reveal the most intimate secrets of human vanity. One lady with a hooked nose wore a huge Bourbon peruke; an anaemic youth sported a romantic wig. In the presence of this hostile indifference, M. Gouverneur was beginning to protest: "Mummy, mummy!" when his wife caught sight of young Destournevalles, and blushed rosy red. He was splendid in his cowboy's hat, the red handkerchief knotted at his throat, bringing out the clean-cut, energetic features of his shaven face. He bowed to Mme. Gouverneur, took her arm, and carried her off almost violently.

"Lucien," she pleaded, "people will think you are running off with me."

"So I am."

His cowboy hat urged him to bold enterprise, and feeling her submissive, trembling with a new emotion, he made passionate love to her. His voice had such ardent and persuasive accents that

Marie, excited and unnerved by the influences of the ball, had perforce to plead for mercy.

"Later," she begged, "later."

They danced together. The young girls, nudging each other, cast side glances on them. They could not be mistaken : it was like the prologue, in action, of one of the books forbidden them. Destournevalles was exulting over his triumph, while Marie, her nostrils quivering, her bosom heaving, yielded to the swing of the dance, trying vainly to resist, and in her whole appearance plainly avowing her passion.

When the dance stopped, they went to one of those shadowy corners that transform an old house into a refuge for lovers. Lucien was endowed with a gift peculiar to great actresses : he wept easily. When Mme. Gouverneur saw tears of passion in his eyes, she lost her head, nestled close to the young man, and stammered, trembling :

"Well, then, at once. Listen, Lucien : yes, at once. Let us go . . . Yes, far, far away . . ."

"But what of your husband ?"

She made an angry gesture, then listened. She heard distinctly, though at a distance, in spite of the hubbub of voices and the sound of the band, the unmistakable "Bsh, bsh, bsh," while the blue tassel, showing above an armchair in the smoking-room, confirmed the presence of her sleeping spouse.

"He is asleep. Let us go . . . Take me away . . . I swear to you that to-morrow will be too late. I would refuse then. Oh ! if you only knew, if you only knew !" . . .

And her hands clasped the somewhat irresponsible hands of M. Destournevalles. Nevertheless, he

came up to the scratch. They resolved to go. There was some hesitation about what they should say at the cloak-room, but they determined to go just as they were. They got into his car. Destournevalles stopped at his rooms, ran up, changed into travelling dress, and returned with a cape and a mantilla for Marie. She gave no thought to the scandal ; she recalled only the dull fireside she was forsaking. That is how it often happens : you go on leading a prosaic life till you are thirty, and then, suddenly, you plunge into poetry.

" Let us go very far away," she suggested. " I have always dreamed of the delight of going in the train with you, my love."

Saint-Lazare station. They had to run through the crowd ; he took a couple of tickets for some place or other. The train was crowded, and it was with difficulty that they secured a couple of seats, opposite each other, in a full compartment. So they could only look and smile at each other, and Lucien's glance was so full of tender promises that Marie's smile was the smile of love's supremest moments.

Three-quarters of an hour went by. Lucien's glance became vaguer ; Marie's smile faded, for fatigue spares not man nor woman, even when their fate is at stake. As though to veil the passion his eyes would express, Lucien closed them ; tried to open them, closed them again, and his head began to yield to the motion of the train, to fall on his shoulder.

And Mme. Gouverneur could not repress a stifled exclamation. He had fallen asleep. Asleep, just like Léon ! His head bobbed from right to left,

forward and back, and he ended by resting it on the shoulder of his neighbour, a stout man, who, when Marie bent forward, said in fatherly fashion :

"Let him sleep, Madame, let him sleep . . . He does not bother me . . . I've been that way myself . . ."

At first she was seized with a wild desire to laugh, painful, irrepressible laughter ; then she became madly angry. This one had not even waited ! The dolt ! Worse still, he slept most ungracefully, his mouth half-open, with a look of beatific vacuity.

The train stopped. Mme. Gouverneur did not hesitate ; she rose and got out, while the stout man called after her : "Here, Madame, are you not forgetting something ?" She had no ticket, but fortunately she had her purse in her reticule, and paid. She found herself in the gloom of desolate, wet country. One of the porters, lantern in hand, routed out a chauffeur, who consented to dress and drive her back to Paris, which she reached at about four in the morning. Her maid welcomed her with effusion.

"Oh, Madame ! It is Madame ! How glad Monsieur will be ! He has cried his heart out."

"I will not need you."

She opened the door of her room. M. Gouverneur, worn out by grief, no doubt, had fallen asleep in an armchair near the bed. She undressed and got into bed without his moving. All was as usual. The "Bsh, bsh, bsh," the monotonous chant of the conjugal fireside, was there ; and Léon still wore his baby's hat. He grunted, turned round, blew his nose with the "Good little Baby" bib, and stirred no more.

Marie wondered how she was going to explain

what had happened. No doubt he would believe anything. She would say she meant to give him a lesson. Meanwhile, as sleep would not come to her, she picked up a book; the story struck her as idiotic—she knew now the truth about the foolishness of adventures. Presently a faint rose gleam tinted the curtains. She started; M. Gouverneur was gazing at her in a vague, uncertain way, his glance still clouded with sleep, and devoid of remembrance. Plainly he thought he was in bed, just as he was every night. He muttered:

"Do put out the light. It's foolish to read so late . . . your damned novels . . . with their dirty lies . . ."

And he went to sleep again.

## XVI

### MADemoiselle DE CALIGNAC

MLLE. DE CALIGNAC had worn away her youth in study. When people remarked that she was alone in the world, and that she must sometimes feel her life to be a sad one, she answered by pointing, with a smile of surprise, to the books which filled her room. Reading them, she had lived through countless hours of heroism, enthusiasm, meditation, foolish fancies, and philosophy. And in this way she had come to know the weary resignation of women who acquiesce in growing old because they have known every joy and every sorrow. When by any chance she went out, the fresh air made her giddy, and her eyes, easily dazzled, sought repose in the attractive titles behind the windows of book-shops, the mysterious and tempting titles of books she had not read. She would buy a packet of them, and full of excitement and anticipation, return quickly, carrying under her arm the pabulum for new and untried emotions.

Nevertheless her doctor was anxious about her. Mlle. de Calignac, possessed of a modest income, was fading away in the dark lower rooms of a house



in the rue de Verneuil. Her heart, overwrought by literary agitations, often failed in its physical duties. It then became necessary to pack the collection of volumes carefully in sixteen cases, to load a cab with an accumulation of antiquities, to put the cat in a basket, and to convey the whole to the sixth floor of a new house in the bright and airy region of the Champ-de-Mars. The rooms, decorated in the Louis XVI style, glittered in the sunshine.

"My old furniture cuts a poor figure in this spick-and-span dairy," jested Mlle. de Calignac ruefully.

And yet she was glad to get back to the sunshine she had hardly caught a glimpse of since childhood. It laughed at and through the diaphanous taffeta curtains, scorched the well-fingered binding of the books, showed up the worn seams in the carpet, and brought the old maid into a happy, idle frame of mind. She would often let fall the volume she held in her hand while she gazed abstractedly at the sky, at the people passing along, at the minute, absorbing dramas of the street. The loves of the world she lived in had never claimed her attention ; now her eyes and imagination followed those shy, retiring couples, who came to the Champ-de-Mars to forget the mournfulness of falling night in the bliss of a long embrace. In this way she continued her studies, but without the intermediary of an author who should colour the truth according to the prevailing taste of the hour. She felt full of indulgence towards this new world.

Mlle. de Calignac was tall, thin, and, to tell the truth, gawky. With a high colour, carelessly dressed, with hair turning grey, she had, in contrast with these attributes, a soft voice, the voice of those

who, in public libraries, are in the habit of speaking low so as not to disturb the studies of their neighbours. When she had effectually effaced the "dairy" by covering its walls with her precious books, she experienced a feeling akin to boredom, and could almost have wished herself back in the obscure retreat where she had passed so many glorious hours. Her dressing-room frightened her, with its tall mirrors, reflecting so uncompromisingly her uncouth figure; it contained a complicated shower-bath with fittings and taps of shining nickel, and was permeated by a vague perfume which the limejuice and almond paste failed to dispel. Moreover, her narrow bed was perched up on a sort of stage, provided with two steps, which she climbed at nine o'clock precisely and descended at six in the morning.

One afternoon she was disconcerted by the appearance of her maid with a bouquet in her hand.

"Good gracious!" cried Mlle. de Calignac. "A bouquet! For me? There is some mistake."

The dewy orchids, and the tremulous maidenhair, were supplemented by an envelope on which was written in rude but clear characters the direction: *Mademoiselle de Calignac*, with the correct address.

"It is not Mademoiselle's birthday?" inquired the maid.

"It has never been my birthday," replied the old maid.

"I will go and call the concierge."

The concierge appeared, solemnly embarrassed.

"I think I can explain," he said. "It is really an extraordinary thing . . . Nothing has been said till now for fear of annoying Mademoiselle . . . In short, it amounts to this: the lady who

occupied these rooms before Mademoiselle had the same name as Mademoiselle . . .”

“De Calignac?”

“De Calignac.”

“I have no relations living. Who would take such a liberty?”

“It was a pseudonym,” said the concierge gravely. “I must tell Mademoiselle that the young lady was a young lady of doubtful character, who danced at the theatres. By the same token it was on that account that she was given notice to quit—on that account, and because she could no longer pay her rent, nor the tradesmen, nor anything, seeing that she fell ill, and her friend had lately given her up and gone to foreign parts, he being an officer.”

“These orchids must be taken to her.”

“Ladies with pseudonyms,” observed the concierge, “always go away without leaving their address. I haven’t a notion where she is.”

Mlle. de Calignac was as much upset by this bouquet as she would have been by the discovery of a new-born babe left in her sitting-room by an unknown hand. Like those babies of romance, the bouquet carried with it no hint of where it came from, and it was difficult to disengage it from the tissue paper that clung to its delicate stalks.

“These poor flowers,” murmured the old maid, “are not to blame, and ought not to suffer. Put them in water, Rosalie. But, good heavens, have I a vase?”

A sufficiently hideous one was found.

“The young lady,” remarked the concierge, “used to arrange her flowers on a little table—there near the window; then she would draw her chair beside it and read.”

"What did she read?"

"Oh, nothing very improving, as you might expect: only yellow-backs and such like."

When the porter was gone, Mlle. de Calignac placed the vase on a little table by the window, drew her chair up to it, and reverted to Montaigne's Essays. But she was distracted, on the one hand by the sight of the people passing below, on the other by the mauve orchids. And between the two, Montaigne was forgotten.

When the orchids began to fade and shrink in the death-throe of flowers, another bouquet of the same kind was brought by a man who introduced himself, and said that he had received two orders and two payments without any indication as to who was the sender. He said ingeniously to Mlle. de Calignac:

"Keep them for yourself if your mistress has a new friend to whom she wishes to remain faithful. It is just as well to encourage trade."

He went out without waiting for a reply, and Mlle. de Calignac was also furiously angry on receiving the next day a letter from Africa addressed to herself, and beginning: "My darling Georgette." She read, however, to the end, because reading was with her almost a reflex action. The letter was not a literary production; not, at least, if judged by the standard of the literature she was wont to feast upon. In every detail of it there was the evidence of brutal passion. The imagination of the writer concentrated on the perfumed chamber, the rapturous bed, on the tender caresses of Georgette, no sooner wooed and won than snatched from his arms by the intervention of his wrathful family . . .

And the end of the letter was of a description

that caused the blood to mount to the withered cheek of the old maid. She wrote on the envelope the usual notification: "Opened by mistake," then she sent for the concierge, and told him that he must put an end to the scandal, and discover at all costs the address of this person, so that the authorities could make her renounce a name hitherto honoured by all.

"I can quite understand Mademoiselle's feelings," replied the concierge, "but in some respects the annoyance has its compensations; Mademoiselle gets the benefit of all the expense to which the dancer went during her residence here: the improvements in the bathroom, the mirrors, the bedsteads with steps, the electric fittings, the wardrobe . . . A nice little thousand-franc note for Mademoiselle to put in her pocket, so to speak. As for the address, I've got it now; here it is."

"Good! I will go and see her."

And Mlle. de Calignac did go, and went bristling with indignation. The number given proved to be a nursing home for poor people, a dreary house, wrapped in gloomy silence. The visitor was conducted to a room in which four women were lying. The palest of them raised herself feebly at the sound of the nurse's voice:

"Someone for you!"

And the three other heads sank back on their pillows.

"I have come to . . ." began Mlle. de Calignac.

She broke off. The other was watching her with something of terror, and with an anxious, trembling of the lip. A creditor, no doubt . . .

"Be seated, Madame . . ."

She was pretty, this pseudo Mlle. de Calignac.

Suffering had banished all hardness, all that was sordid and vulgar from her features; she had the appearance of a dying child, with her pitiful night-dress, her hair simply and severely parted on her forehead, her frail, wasted, ringless hands.

"I want to tell you," resumed Mlle. de Calignac, but in a low voice that trembled with compassion . . . "that I have taken your rooms in the Champ-de-Mars, and that I do not wish to be indebted to you for what you have expended on them. I wish you to take this thousand-franc note . . . Wait. I have something more to say . . . Someone . . . who is in Africa . . . has not forgotten you . . . The next time he sends you flowers I will bring them to you. . . . You must look after yourself, and hope for the best . . . Good-bye till we meet again . . . Mademoiselle de Calignac . . ."

She put her finger to her lips to enjoin silence, and went out. The young creature remained motionless, the note in her emaciated hand, stupefied by such unexpected good fortune. And the other women made signs to each other, greatly wondering, full of the curiosity of the hospital about anything that forms a link with the outside world.

"That must be her landlady!" whispered one of them.





## XVII

### AT THE CAFÉ

M. AUGUSTE CHENOUILLE went home every evening at six o'clock, the neighbourhood in which he lived being an insecure one. He occupied a flat consisting of three rooms at the top of the pretentious house facing the fortifications between two tumble-down shops where they sold old iron, old books, old shoes and vitriolic wine. He liked this retreat set among straggling city trees that could hardly maintain life, because he had an equal dislike for the real country and the real town.

As he entered, the portress called to him :

“ Here, you ! Here's a letter for you.”

He looked scared.

“ A letter for me, Madame Colduc ? Are you quite sure ? ”

Mme. Colduc deigning no reply, he took the letter, scrutinised it, and put it in his pocket with a sigh.

“ Ah, I know what it is.”

Then he mounted the staircase with the slow steps of the man whom no one is expecting, and who will find his rooms in the same comfortless state in which

he left them. As he passed the different floors, the humble but vigorous vitality of the neighbours asserted itself: here the strumming of a piano to greet the husband's return; there a child's laughter, a murmur of gossiping; or yet again—a simple thing in itself—the big new loaf placed at the door of the home of a large family. This was his daily martyrdom: everything seemed to be crying aloud: "What's the use of you?"

Once in his room, and surrounded by his familiar belongings, M. Chenouille shook himself, stretched his tall figure to its full height, smiled at the portraits of departed friends, looked at himself in the glass, and with a quick movement stroked his military moustache. For this shy person had the cut of a military man: he sported, besides the large grey moustache and closely-cropped hair, the mouche on the chin which was formerly the regular style. "Not quite done for yet," he muttered. His face was tanned, as if he lived much in the open air, and to people who spoke to him for the first time, his rather prominent eyes gave the impression of a not very conciliatory disposition. It often happened that soldiers attached to the adjacent dépôt saluted him, taking him for one of their officers. M. Chenouille returned the salute, flattered and complaisant . . .

He hummed to himself by way of enlivening his occupation, which was that of frying a couple of eggs. One would have thought he was handling dynamite. He broke the eggs into the frying-pan at arm's length, and with averted face, as if he were afraid of the little explosions caused by the frizzling butter. While the eggs cooked, he threw himself into an armchair near the window so as to

get a view of the sky and the tops of the chestnut trees. Down on the fortifications, in each other's arms and sharply silhouetted on the ground, a couple were mingling their kisses, drawing away from each other at intervals as if to increase the fervour of their embrace. Absorbed in watching this performance, M. Chenouille found his eggs cold when he came to eat them, and with a shrug of impatience he wrote on the slate with which he communicated with his charwoman: "The eggs still smell of the straw; it's disgusting." On reflection, he rubbed out the word "disgusting," and substituted "intolerable"; then he rubbed out the whole sentence so that he might write anew: "I fancy the eggs smell a little of the straw."

And it was only then that he opened the letter. It was signed "Zizi"—a Zizi of fifty, whom he had known in 1888, whom he had loved for fourteen months, who had absorbed three-quarters of his meagre inheritance, and to whom, in return for these benefactions, he allowed a small pension. She was full of the usual lamentations, and as usual asked him for money:

"My generous Auguste, I can't possibly get on to the end of the month. I am worn out with weeping. It would be sweet of you if you could send me four louis by return of post, or five if you could manage it. It is urgent, as I am in debt and proceedings are threatened."

Then, as a form of politeness, "I remain yours affectionately . . ." as she had remained for twenty years, with the inevitable postscript: "In haste!" to excuse such abbreviations as: "Sd. me four louis by ret. of p. . . Affte." In 1888, to the frantic tear-stained letters full of avowals of

love, she would reply: "Y. know tht. I love y. and tht. I am alwys. yrs."—which gave her most passionate effusions the character of business letters.

M. Chenouille, whose patience was exhausted, took a sheet of notepaper, and wrote in a firm hand:

"My dear friend, you know how limited my means are, and what sacrifices I have made to continue allowing . . ."

He tore up the paper and began again:

"My dear friend, I cannot possibly send you more than . . ."

He tore up this also, but there was no more paper. Poor Zizi! It was in vain for her to repeat: "I keep in good condition, because I have always lived carefully." She was now nothing but a wreck, a caricature of what she used to be, with her old tow-wig, her toothless gums, and her rheumatic limbs. Well, he would send her the eighty francs. Besides, he was bored to a point that made a little extra shortness of money a distraction, for it would mean devising some means for extra economy. "By return of post," she had said: she should have them the following morning. And he repaired to the Café Moderne, where he was wont to take refuge from the weariness of indolence.

"Good-evening, ladies and gentlemen!"

There were only two little working girls, who were exchanging confidences with much vivacity, and a fat man, a regular customer, slumbering behind his spectacles, and wearing a sort of ulster formerly affected by cabmen.

"Waiter! Writing materials, and a glass of coffee."

M. Chenouille opened the blotting-book which

the waiter brought him, and to his surprise, discovered an unfinished letter written in a tremulous hand and full of erasures—evidently a draft for one that had been sent.

He closed the blotting-book, opened it again, and finally, blushing at his curiosity, read as follows :

Henri,

Do not smile. Your sarcasms have already caused me sufficient pain. Seeing it is a question of really saying farewell, think of that word with the gravity it demands and take me seriously for once—the first time and the last. As you know, I am only twenty, but I have suffered so much on your account that love has made me old. And now I am weary of it all ; I can strive no more ; I am vanquished in the struggle, and you must in pity leave me. You used to say : “ What have you to complain of ? Do I not make you happy ? ” It is true, our quarrels always ended in reconciliations, but they always left in my heart a sullen rancour and a curious fear, the fear of to-morrow, when I knew I should so bitterly reproach myself for a little self-indulgence to-day. What did I wish for ? Ah, for something very different. For peace, for confidence, for two hearts linked together in mutual adoration, willing to suffice one to the other, and live together in seclusion, cut off from all other knowledge of life. That is all I sigh for now. You like making new acquaintances ; you love the gaiety and glamour, the stir and bustle of the crowd. We could never get on together. What I need is a soul that will find

its whole delight in me, that will be repelled by the rest of womankind. I picture the man of my choice as being delicate, you are strong; timid, you are bold; silent, you rattle on; melancholy, you are full of high spirits; not very young: a man verging on the decline of life, who knows that he is doomed to a miserable old age unless he has ever near him the watchfulness and fidelity of a true helpmate. Do not laugh, my Jean: with some women it is impossible to give love without giving devotion . . .

M. Chenouille turned pale, and his heart thrilled with joy. "I am," he said, "the man whom this woman is in search of; she is the woman I am seeking. We must meet."

He called the waiter:

"Do ladies often come here?"

"Yes, Monsieur. But Monsieur will find more of them in the Montmartre quarter. As for coming here, yes, certainly they come sometimes; sometimes they don't. It's all according."

He lowered his head, and pointed with his table napkin to the two young women.

"I advise you to have nothing to do with those two: one's very common as well as a bad lot: the other can't speak three words without letting drop beastly expressions. They called me 'fat-head' and 'pig-face' because I drew their attention to the fact that they were carrying off all the sugar. To think that there are men who will embrace such things! Spank them with an old shoe, if you like!"

That evening, M. Chenouille did not push his



investigation further. A great happiness, an infinite hope, lifted him to the skies. He pocketed the letter, took it away, read it over a hundred times, covered it with kisses. This was quite a different affair from Zizi's—dull, stupid, selfish Zizi. Here was a "helpmate," sympathetic, intellectual and refined. How happy they might be together up on his sixth floor, with arms entwined at the window, steeped in calm felicity!

The following day, he prepared his rooms as if for a speedy arrival. So many things were necessary for a woman—powder and rouge, scent, scissors and work-box. She should find everything complete and new. He would say to her: "I was waiting for you." Choice flowers in the vases, and to get rid of the smell of cigarettes, orris-root powder scattered over the furniture and hangings. He made himself as spruce as possible, curled his moustache, and donned his frock-coat.

"In future don't come in without knocking!" he gave orders to his charwoman.

In the evening he paid another visit to the restaurant.

"Waiter, isn't there a lady who comes here sometimes—who writes letters?"

"That is so, Monsieur."

"A lady about twenty years old—rather sad-looking . . ."

"That must be Mme. Fernand, so I have heard her called."

"Ah! And will she come this evening?"

"On the stroke of nine; it is seldom she misses coming."

M. Chenouille turned a little faint. She was actually coming! He was going to speak to her!



He would begin: "Madame, a fortunate oversight . . ." And he seemed to detect already the perfume heralding her approach . . .

Opposite to where he was sitting, the *habitué* in the ulster was looking at him over his spectacles. This fat man looked perturbed. He disengaged his bulky form from the marble table, rose with difficulty, and came barging towards M. Chenouille, who also rose, somewhat astonished.

"Excuse me, Monsieur," said the fat man, "but I am told that you were supplied with a blotting-book yesterday, and I want to ask whether you found in it a page of copy I left there. It is the commencement of my forthcoming work, Monsieur. Allow me to introduce myself: Léon Batracard, novelist . . . Pray put on your hat, Monsieur . . . I work here because I get little peace at home . . . A wife with a most penetrating voice . . . Then you really have not found the sheet? Most provoking. It was a letter which Armande wrote to Henri—soppy in sentiment and colouring, and not a masterpiece . . . but devil take it, with no illusions left . . . And you see, Monsieur, I can always get three-halfpence a line . . ."

## XVIII

### THE TOOTHPICK

AFTER lunch, while they had coffee in the winter-garden of the hotel, Gustave Lechoqueur, seated opposite his wife, amused himself by a noisy use of his toothpick. Françoise Lechoqueur raised her fair head from some complicated embroidery work, and darted a withering glance at her husband.

"Gustave," she remonstrated, "that toothpick again! . . . A shocking habit!"

Gustave, submissive, began to hum in a low voice a dismal air which ran in his head, the tune being rather doubtful, and the words represented by a vague "trou-la-la-itou."

"We are not alone," she went on, "people can hear you."

And Gustave was reduced to silence. He was a big fellow, ruddy, frank-looking, unimpressible, docile, who looked as if his moustache had grown on the face of a merry child.

"What do you want me to do?" he asked.

"Oh, I don't know. Read."

"Can't be done."

"Write."

"Can't be done!"

"Go and fish; shoot seagulls; build castles on the sands, pick up shells; anything you like. There are other amusements, thank Heaven, besides sucking a toothpick and singing that maddening 'Trou-la-la' to an idiotic tune."

Whereupon she bent over her work again.

"It seems incredible," she reflected, "that a man like this can be deceiving me. And yet . . . But patience; he will see!"

"Ah, here's the post," cried Gustave. "Is there anything for me, postman?"

"Only a letter for Madame," answered the postman.

"Give it to me. Look, Françoise, it's from your milliner."

"Yes, a bill."

"Well, I think I'll go out for half-an-hour's stroll."

"You take your toothpick with you, I notice. I wish you'd throw it away . . ."

Left alone, Françoise opened the letter, the envelope of which bore the initials and address of the milliner, but which came from Sauvecoq & Co.'s Detective Agency. It ran thus:—

Madame,

Acting on your instructions, we have traced the young lady in question. She is no longer in Paris; she is at the Hôtel des Bains, Kernic-sur-Mer. She entered her name in the travellers' register as "Madame Gobette, no occupation," and said to the clerk in the office: "My husband will join me the day after tomorrow; he has been detained on business."

She has taken a double-bedded room and a dressing and bath-room. She is accompanied by a servant of the soubrette kind, and a spaniel, which answers to the name of "Michet" at Paris, and to that of "Plum" here, and she appears respectable inasmuch as she has brought with her some pillow-cases to embroider. She is occupying a room numbered 13, and our agent has taken the adjoining one, No. 15, in his name, Hocquebouche. He has told the proprietor that Mme. Hocquebouche is expected. Under this name, which does not sound like a borrowed one, you will be able to find out personally what is going on.

Always devoted to your service, I may remind you that a further remittance is now due, and I beg you, Madame, to accept my respectful compliments.

Gustave now returned from his walk with a telegram in his hand, and an air of extreme annoyance.

"Look," he cried, "what has just been given to me! Such bad luck! I was only beginning to enjoy myself here, and now I have to go to Paris about that Saumurien mortgage. I won't ask you to go with me: it seems to be turning cold, and the journey would tire you. Besides, it is but a matter of two or three days, possibly four, not more than five in any case. I shall just put the necessary things in my portmanteau. I do hope you won't let it inconvenience you. I shall go to a hotel, because nothing makes me feel so lonely as our rooms when you are not there. By Jove, it looks

like fate ! Last year, it was that idiot Theodore who wanted a second for a duel which didn't even come off. This year it is the Saumurien mortgage."

"When he is lying," was Françoise's silent commentary, "he says too much ; his nose wrinkles and he squints. As for his mouth, it twists about in all directions, as if the lie could not make up its mind which way to come out."

"I'll come and help you pack," she said.

They went up to their bedroom, where he packed his things, humming "tra-la-la-itou" all the time.

"Stop, stop ! I mustn't do that ! It's absurd of me. I know it worries you, but I do it without thinking . . ."

"Gustave," she said, really in earnest, "what worries me is that you should have to go away."

"But I have arranged everything now."

"Never mind, give up this journey."

"Can't be done !"

"Good-bye then."

He kissed her, saying :

"I assure you it is more of a worry to me than it is to you."

Then he took his departure.

The next day, Françoise took hers. It is a long journey from the Pyrenees to Kernic-sur-Mer. Mme. Lechoqueur now tasted the first-fruits of the liberty she was seeking.

In the train, a neighbour, shaggier than Blue Beard, inflicted upon her in succession, his breath reeking with garlic, his knees, his foot, and other gallant attentions repeated with flattering persistence. She found this would-be seducer at her side again in the restaurant-car, where he handed

her the salt and the mustard with an air of offering her his heart and his fortune.

"Monsieur," said she at last, "in begging you to leave me in peace, I soften what I should like to say by several degrees. As I see by your smile that you mean to persist, let me tell you that my husband is meeting me, and that I shall not fail, if you continue to annoy me, to tell him of your importunities."

"The last time," she thought, "that I shall be able to say 'my husband.' At least, Gustave will have been of some little use to me."

Nothing else of consequence occurred during the journey to Kernic-sur-Mer, where the Hôtel des Bains presented a façade of forbidding appearance, like that of a deserted house. The whole aspect of this vulgar seaside place, with its high charges, was in all respects repelling. Françoise asked for the room retained for Mme. Hocquebouche.

"You will serve dinner in my room."

What a dinner! Françoise called to mind those widows, those divorcées, those old maids, whose loneliness is all the more depressing amid the stir and bustle of a hotel, and she struggled in melancholy mood with a chicken of the consistency of india-rubber, and with peaches that were as hard as their kernels. She had sketched out her plan: probably her husband and Gobette would not turn the key in their door, and she would appear suddenly, and take them *in flagrante delicto*. No need for police interference; that little scene would suffice. She pictured to herself Gustave's face; that ruddy, fresh face, suddenly convulsed with fear . . . At nine she heard the sound of footsteps. The couple were going into their room . . . No sound of

locking the door . . . She was on the point of leaving her room when she recognised the "trou-la-la-itou" of her husband. She stopped and listened.

"You won't stop it then?" said a shrill voice, doubtless Gobette's.

"Stop what?" asked Gustave.

"Your little song. Would you like me to get some paper so that you can score it down in case I forget it?"

"That's good, that is!"

"And your toothpick! When it is used under cover of the left hand, as it is by well-mannered people, it is perhaps excusable. But you—you attack your teeth openly, poke at them violently. At table, everybody watches you until I am perfectly ashamed. If you had a wife, who is what I call a wife, she would let you have her mind on the subject of these tricks of yours. Chuck the beastly thing out the window—at once, or I shall go into hysterics. I am not very well as it is: it's the salt in the air that upsets me . . . Wait a moment while I search you. What did I tell you? Another toothpick! You'd find it difficult to keep company with a dirtier pig than the one you are yourself!"

"That's good, that is!" repeated Gustave meekly.

A silence, broken by Gobette.

"No, my boy, it's not good enough! When I say that you get on my nerves, I mean what I say. It's a waste of life being here. Having to sew, me! Just fancy! Or I read, write, fish for shrimps, play the fool on the sands, pick up shells . . . and in the evening I feel rotten. No! I'm done with you, I'm off to Paris . . ."



At break of day, the pseudo-Mme. Hocquebouché left the Hôtel des Bains without making her visit known. Two days later her husband found her as he had left her, bending over her embroidery. He felt reassured by the look she gave him, a look in which gleamed something of tender irony.

"It's one o'clock; you must be dying for something to eat."

"The mortgage . . ."

"You can tell me all about it at lunch . . ."

It was a very pleasant meal. Poor Gustave! No one by any possibility could idolise him, but he was an agreeable companion, docile, unfaithful, perhaps, but capable of compunction that amounted, on the whole, to genuine remorse. His escapade had miscarried; he had returned to his wife bruised by the sharp corners of this Gobette, who must be as thin as a scarecrow, for her very voice was cutting. Now, he had all the appearance of a successful lover. He ordered champagne, was in the highest spirits, suppressed his "trou-la-laitou," risked a pun or two, even a few compliments. Then, at dessert, she found it in her heart to reward him, and in a gentle, wifely way, with that considerate kindness which people adopt towards very small children, she said:

"Have you had all you want, dear?" And to the waiter: "Bring the toothpicks for Monsieur . . ."



## XIX

### THE LETTERS

AT the age of fifteen Claude Senechal went blind. He displayed sublime fortitude at first, affecting to laugh for the sake of his old mother, whose voice too often quavered through her tears. Then revolt plunged him into the depths of sullen silence. In the end he became resigned to his fate. There was now no trace of the graceful and athletic youth, who had been growing towards a man's full life; only a pallid being, with limp, frail body, bowed shoulders and thin beard. He had the sad face of the blind, and his nerveless hands did little more than open and shut in twitches. Finally, he passed his days in an armchair. Knowing that he was fond of poetry, Mme. Senechal read him selections in a monotonous tone that depressed him.

"Ah, mother," he complained, "you don't understand either Hugo or Baudelaire or Verlaine! . . ."

"No, my dear, I don't. I don't understand these lofty sentiments and artistic subtleties. I have never loved anyone but you . . ."

Then he held out his arms, and caught her to his

breast. He knew her whole story ; her joyless youth, her marriage with a profligate, her divorce after years of misery.

" Our destinies are alike," he said at last. " Of what use have your eyes been to you, my poor little mother ? "

" To look at you."

The happiest hours they spent were those of the Sunday dinner. Their one guest was M. Lethiestat, a solicitor, well stricken in years, whose persistent optimism and high spirits cheered Claude. When the liqueurs were served, Mme. Senechal slipped away and left M. Lethiestat to entertain him with men's stories.

" You ought to go out," he insisted. " To think that you have not a single friend ! Your mother—of course, that's all very well. But you are running to seed. You have the temperament of other people, and ought to live accordingly. Women, now . . . "

Claude raised his frail hand :

" Women ! They will never take any interest in me except through pity or curiosity or self-interest."

" But it's the same for everyone ! "

" Possibly ; but when one lives in eternal night one has such beautiful illusions . . . "

Nevertheless, he consented to be present at a big dinner which the veteran solicitor gave annually. He was placed between two ladies, who assumed the part of Sisters of Charity, filling his glass for him, helping him in the little details of eating, and displaying ostentatiously the sweetness of their dispositions. He went home in bitterness of spirit. But the brief time he had passed beside those

unseen beings, whom he conceived to be beautiful, returned as a disturbing memory. Caressing hands had touched his own ; he had breathed mysterious perfumes. And he fell into a melancholy mood filled with hopeless longing.

Mme. Senechal was aware of this. For a long time she had watched for these symptoms, had studied the blank face, where, in spite of all her care, she recognised the characteristics of his father. She had dreaded this more than all else, and the little that remained of masculinity in this wreck of manhood alarmed her.

Then she formed the idea of introducing romance into the life of her Claude. Thrice a week, Marthe, a seamstress, was employed in the house, an effaced creature with wispy hair, who had in her youth taken a second prize for music in the provinces. Mme. Senechal had come across her on the arm of a doubtful-looking companion.

"One must have somebody to live for," said Marthe in excuse. "He has promised to marry me . . . He appreciates music . . . I play Mendelssohn to him."

One day she came to the house in tears : he had abandoned her. Mme. Senechal offered what consolation she could, and insinuatingly suggested that she should take service as companion to her son, mentioning handsome remuneration. At last she revealed, without reserve, an elaborate scheme, with substantial reward for Marthe as sequel. The latter had never seen Claude, as he passed his time shut up in his study. She accepted this proposal from motives of cupidity inconsistently mingled with romance.

A week afterwards, Mme. Senechal introduced her

son to Mme. Marthe Hennevioux, the daughter of one of her old school-fellows. Unhappily married, Mme. Hennevioux was applying for a divorce. Marthe played her part well; Claude received her with complaisance though he seemed politely bored. But the visitor, being asked to play, seated herself at the piano; and he begged her, on his own initiative, to repeat her visit. He loved music with a love that vibrated through his soul: he found in it a sort of anæsthesia, a forgetfulness that soothed and uplifted him.

In the evening, M. Lethiestat found his blind friend more talkative than usual. When Mme. Senechal had retired:

"How do I seem to be dressed?" he asked. "In the style of 1885, I feel sure. You must send your tailor to me . . . My mother does not bother about my clothes so long as she is satisfied that they are warm in winter and cool in summer . . ."

And little by little the miracle was achieved. Marthe was mindful of her instructions, which were, to talk as little as possible so as to avoid vulgarities that might awaken Claude's half-sleeping suspicions. On the other hand, she was often at the piano, where she chose themes of an erotic type. He listened, and soon became a prey to sickening jealousy, as if she were confiding to him the secrets of her romantic past. One day, he said with dry curtness:

"No more, no more, I entreat you! . . . I am not feeling well . . . Mother . . ."

"Mme. Senechal is in her room; she is dressing."

"Excuse me . . . I am such an invalid, so nervous . . ."

She said:

"But I can sympathise with you. . . . There are days when music is torture to me."

He got up and went in the direction of the voice. He thought Marthe was at some distance when he stumbled up against her. As he staggered, she supported him. And it was thus that he savoured, without knowing definitely whether he had given or received it, the unique ecstasy of the first kiss.

The idyll lasted for three months. Claude, as if by miracle, recovered in some degree the healthy and gracious air of youth. Then Marthe grew tired of the comedy. She sent Mme. Senechal a telegram, cynically stating that she was going to run a café in Belgium with the other one, and that she was off for good. The mother was in terror as to the effect of so sudden a shock on her son. And she resolved to continue the episode by means of letters . . .

In the first, she accounted for the departure by the fiction of a furious husband suddenly re-appearing, and she let fall hints of a speedy return . . . perhaps . . .

The letters were supposed to arrive daily. The old servant read them, after her own fashion, to her master. And Claude wondered greatly. Marthe had no pretension to eloquence or facility of expression ; she had often shocked him by banalities both of language and sentiment. And the letters were delightful ! so tender, so chastely emotional, so delicately passionate. He had the pleasant surprise of finding in them every time the very thing he was longing to read. How well this woman knew him ! The words ceased to be mere words : they were so many consolations and caresses. Something now held him to life, made life dear to him ; he felt himself to be an indispensable part of this soul



that was parted from him, and was unhappy without him. And he conceived a pride which linked him with normal manhood. He dictated long replies, exhorting Marthe to gain her freedom, plighted his troth to her with the confidence of virile passion . . . There was, however, one phrase which aroused in him a vague suspicion. He made the servant read it a second time, and the suspicion became more defined : that phrase—he had heard it before.

“Mother,” he abruptly questioned Mme. Senechal, “Mother, we are good chums, you and I, aren’t we ? May I ask you something? . . . Is it possible that you were never in love ? ”

“Never ! ”

“Not even secretly in love ? ”

“Not even that. It’s the same with many other women, who only find consolation when a child is born to them.”

He felt reassured. The suspicion that his mother had something to do with the letters left him ; they really were from Marthe.

But one summer evening after dinner, as he smoked a cigar at the window with M. Lethiestat, he noticed that the latter was melancholy, as if the fading tenderness of twilight had touched the heart of the sprightly old man. They spoke of love.

“I have muddled away my life,” sighed M. Lethiestat . . . “A bachelor, with no belongings—that’s not a cheerful thing to contemplate as the days go on. Is it now ? Come ! . . . ”

There was a silence, then he added :

“There can be no harm in telling you. I loved your mother . . . I had no position . . . our parents opposed the match . . . ”

Claude trembled.

"And she—she? Did she return your love? Tell me—you need not hesitate . . ."

M. Lethiestat sighed deeply.

"No, I need not. We were engaged for years. . . . I was in the country; your mother in Paris . . . We wrote to each other. I had the dearest letters from her, models of faithfulness, of truth . . . And then they married her . . . And now we are both grown old . . . I am not myself this evening . . . But what is the matter, Claude? Ah, ah, he is fainting!"

Claude recovered himself with an effort, but he appeared to be almost gay before his old friend left him. Then, when he was alone with his mother, he gave way and burst into tears. Mme. Senechal saw that he knew, and she did not try to deceive him. She simply took him to her breast and rocked him to and fro.

"Do not cry for her," she said, "do not cry . . . she is not worth it . . . It is your first disillusion; those who have their eyesight have many another!"

Then he pressed his blank face against the poor suffering one.

"Ah," he said, "I felt certain that a real love could not have had so much sweet friendliness . . ."



## XX

### THE ROSEBUD

AFTER many and various metamorphoses, Mme. Begureuil had opened a shop for the sale of rouge, tinctures and perfumes—*The Rosebud*. A delightful shop, it must be confessed, recalling, by its white walls, its wreaths in stucco-work, and its engravings, the eighteenth century with its gallant abuse of paint, patches and powder.

The proprietress presented a striking appearance of a mummy daubed over with the brightest colours; her lips showed scarlet amidst the enamel with which her face was encrusted, and her dull eyes peered out from a deep pencilling of blue that surrounded them. A Ceres of sixty-six summers, she wore on her head a complicated fabrication of golden hair, diversified by little reddish frizzles; her slightest movement gave rise to a whiff of heavy scent; glowing with vermilion, the lobes of her ears rejoiced in false pearls, and rings of flashy paste adorned fingers with lacquered nails. The shop did not open till noon, its mistress requiring the whole morning to bring her face to perfection, and thus display to her customers what she believed to be an

inducement to buy her wares; but which was, as a matter of fact, a warning against them.

Chance customers in quest of amusement, and of an inquisitive turn of mind, came in to make little purchases, and found satisfaction in visiting this commercial retreat. With Mme. Begureuil it was more like holding a reception than doing business. She had given up smiling, because the smile, though it is the distinguishing attribute of man, spoils the artistic work of the enamelled woman; but she seasoned her recommendations with a spice of psychology:

“ You see this ointment, Madame; you take a portion of it, the size of a pea, and smear it over the temples before going to bed; it is at the temples that the most intellectual of us grow old; it is necessary to protect ourselves; the gentlemen are not wrong in saying: ‘ Woe to the conquered!’ May I wrap you up a little pot, price twenty-five francs? ”

Charming repository! Everything was fresh and graceful, down to the rose-tinted wrapping-paper and the string of azure blue; the cash-box was like a jewel-case, and on it was depicted the shepherd Acis playing the flute to Galatea; a bergamot scent-bag enclosed the bank-notes; the account-book had the form and binding of a comic almanac; the air was laden with the mist of a scent-spray, which played incessantly. Vagrants passing the shop sniffed suspiciously at these unaccustomed odours. Mme. Begureuil was assisted in her labours by an ill-favoured, dumpy, slatternly wench, who never showed herself, attending to the coarser details of the business in the back-shop. The old lady devoted her leisure-hours to an exhaustive examina-

tion of her features; by concentrating on an imaginary self, she ceased to see her real self, and the illusion was enhanced by the obscurity of the place. Then would she attribute her protracted virginity to one of those inexplicable renunciations, which may sometimes be observed in young actresses at the height of their fame.

"Love," she said, "is no longer a concern of mine, except in so far as it concerns others . . ."

One day, when she was adjusting an artificial eyebrow, she left her task unfinished, and set the scent-spray going while she went to speak to a young girl who had come in.

"What can I do for you, Mademoiselle?"

But the visitor put out her hand.

"Good-morning, Aunt! Don't you recognise me? Have I grown out of knowledge?"

"Ah," cried Mme. Begureuil, changing her tone, "it is Lucienne."

"Yes, it is Lucienne Métu, Aunt."

"Well, sit down, at all events."

And Lucienne told her story. Her widowed mother lived frugally at Garenne-Bezons on the smallest of annuities. There was nothing in that for a young girl, you know. She had made up her mind to come heroically, all alone, by the tram, and find out her Aunt Emma; because when you are in any sort of need, it is natural to look up your relations, even though they have been estranged by family quarrels with which you have nothing to do. Lucienne would be glad to get any kind of employment—no matter what. She had already exercised her talents in various capacities, but so far without permanent results. As a teacher of French in a Brazilian family, they had declined to

continue her services because she had written : " Monsieur Pable n'a pas fait son devoir d'hortaugraphe et Mademoiselle Lola ses contes d'aritmaitique." She had been an agent for the sale of handkerchiefs, and first lady's maid to an actress who kept but one.

" And I am not twenty yet ! " she concluded with a touch of pride.

Mme. Begureuil uttered an exclamation in which jealousy, disappointment and admiration contended for expression. Not twenty ! Lucienne was a pretty girl, lavishly developed, well set-up, who had not parted with the innocent nose and trustful eyes of childhood. Not very sharp certainly, but what could you expect ? The Métus were always distinguished by an almost brutish stupidity. But not twenty ! That meant hair, teeth, health, high spirits, a bust that would have delighted a fashion-plate artist of the year 1885, a rose-and-lily face that you might picture on a box of soap. The mere sight of her in the glory of her youth made Mme. Begureuil shudder . . . Then she took a sudden resolution.

" Take off your hat," she said. " An idea occurs to me. Suppose I try you here in my business. You have only to agree with everything I say ; that's hardly beyond your intelligence. We shall have to polish you up a little, though."

" Oh, that's done already, Aunt ! I have had affairs with an engineer, a music-hall artist, a guano merchant . . . "

" Stop ; that's not what I mean. What do you take me for ? By ' polish,' I mean affability to customers, pushing sales, and keeping an eye on shop-lifters. You will address me as ' Mme. Begureuil.' "



"Yes, Aunt. I like the idea very much; it smells so nice here."

"Put your hat in that wardrobe and come and sit beside me. Be careful of one thing: if I ask you a question, you must answer in a grave voice and not too quickly. Do you understand? I'll explain. . . . Wait though; here's a customer."

The scent-spray was set going as a client entered. A good customer, to judge by the infirmities she described: dry, hairy skin, black-heads on the nose, chapped lips, and, worst of all, dimples which had once charmed so many admirers now changed into wrinkles.

"Wrinkles are permanent dimples," pronounced Mme. Begureuil. "Ladies laugh so much when they are young that they keep the impression of them when they would rather be without them."

But there was a remedy, and it was at hand—this little pot of ointment that looked so insignificant. The customer shied at the price, and was going to back out with the purchase of twenty centimes' worth of black pins when Mme. Begureuil had recourse to a last argument:

"See for yourself! . . . Madame Lucienne, please come here a moment . . . Yes, my assistant, Madame, who uses this ointment, is turned forty."

"Forty!" exclaimed the customer.

"Her eldest is an artilleryman at La Fère. Is it not so, Madame Lucienne?"

And Mme. Lucienne catching on, replied in a deep voice:

"Yes, Madame, I was forty on the sixth of last month."

"And you can tell Madame—come, Madame

Lucienne, there is no shame in it—that before you knew of this ointment, you were almost repulsive to behold. It has removed your moustache, smoothed out the crow's feet, and clarified the complexion to such a degree that people take you for your son's sister, your husband's daughter and your father's grand-daughter."

The customer, hesitating no longer, bought in succession a pot of ointment, two bottles of reviving essence, some pencils, some rejuvenating cream, and a brush for the eyebrows. And Lucienne Métu was definitely engaged in spite of her child-like simplicity. However, after some weeks, her rôle of quadragenarian became displeasing to her as she felt mortified in the presence of gentlemen.

"Don't bother about that," said Mme. Begureuil. "Can you imitate the voice of a very young girl reciting a fable?"

"Listen," returned Lucienne; "you shall judge; why, it's my strong point—I used to do it at evening parties to make them laugh:

"Mathter Crow on a vevy high tree  
Held a vevy fine cheese in hith beak . . ."

From that time she was employed in advertising a hygienic scarf for the amplification of inadequate busts.

"I hope you fully understand," said the proprietress. "Don't go and confuse things. For the ointment you are forty years old; for the scarf you are fifteen. In the case of a customer wanting to buy both articles, simply hold your tongue."

Lucienne was delighted with this game. She piped:

"I am fifteen, and before I used the Savannah scarf, I was as flat as an ironing-board . . ."

And she called Mme. Begureuil, "Mamma."

While all this was going on, Madame's peace of mind was somewhat disturbed by a M. Ledombricque, a gentleman of tottering gait, dressed with old-fashioned taste, and in whom near-sightedness seemed extremely improbable. As he made frequent visits to the shop, Mme. Begureuil became uneasy, thinking that her niece was the attraction. What a flutter of pride did she feel when she was convinced that he came on her own account, and that he was addressing to her the most correct, the most antiquated and the most tender of courtships! At each of these visits, in order that he might be encouraged to declare himself, she got rid of Lucienne on one pretext or another; and she expatiated on the unhappy situation of a widow, still not much past her youth, and left alone in the world with a child of fifteen.

"I was twenty-six when she was born," she lisped. "I am old, very old; I have no wish to conceal my age from you."

For all reply, M. Ledombricque squeezed her hand with gentle eloquence. He came one evening just as the ladies were shutting up the shop; his attire, his feverish excitement, revealed plainly the state of his feelings; but at the moment when Mme. Begureuil was sending away Lucienne, she herself was called into the back-shop by the slatternly maid.

"My dear," said M. Ledombricque, "now that we are alone, here are twenty-five francs; give me quickly a pot of the ointment. I should like to rejuvenate myself a little . . . Above all, let Her

know nothing ! . . . Do you really think this will have any effect ? ”

Mme. Begureuil was returning ; she heard, and her heart beat joyfully. This poor old M. Ledombricque ! He would be invaluable to her. . . . As for Lucienne, she wrapped the ointment in the rose-tinted paper, and tied it around with the azure-blue string, as she replied in a hollow voice :

“ Have any effect ! Why, Monsieur, just look at me ! I am turned forty. My eldest is an artilleryman at La Fère. Before I knew of this ointment I was almost repulsive to behold ; it has removed my moustache, smoothed out the crow’s feet, and . . . But hush, here is Mamma ! ”

M. Ledombricque started, looked round, saw the object of his passion with eyes opened in every sense, and fled. Mme. Begureuil paled under her rouge, and wavered between fury and fainting. But Lucienne, resuming her natural voice, remarked :

“ All the same, Aunt, I do think I’m getting awfully good at selling things ! ”

## XXI

### THE PUNCH AND JUDY SHOW

WHAT were the reasons that led Georges Deparville, still with his all-conquering air, his figure set off by a fashionable coat, his moustaches curled up, and carrying in his hand a pig-skin suit case, to arrive one day in the primmest of family boarding-houses in Passy? Only the magistrate charged to inquire into certain matters in which Georges was mixed up could have told. Meanwhile, Mme. Colacier, the landlady of the aforesaid boarding-house, was dazzled by his unexpected arrival. Her clients consisted chiefly of the elderly English ladies, who everlastingly travel to acquire new knowledge, and a few people from the provinces, who sought the peace of their native home in the little suburban house set in its own garden. The sight of this elegant arrival greatly excited the landlady.

"It is so very quiet here," she stammered.

Georges Deparville replied that the quietness pleased him; that he felt the need of remaining unknown, and that he sought, after much travel, something of homelife: meals at regular hours, his napkin in a ring bearing his initials, the loaf of

bread neatly sliced, the biscuit he could dip in a glass of wine after dinner, and even—think of it! he a regular first-nighter—the quiet evenings spent by the piano.

“I am ordered a rest-cure, and I shall be very comfortable here. Do not worry, Madame; I shall have no visitors; I shall not go out, and I shall remain two or three months, perhaps longer. It is possible that later I may want two or three rooms, and bring my furniture and my books. I am weary of noise, of excitement. I feel I am on the brink of an attack of neurasthenia, and what has drawn me to your place is the silence of the neighbourhood, and the pretty white curtains at the windows. A retreat, a real one, that recalls my childhood. I need to be, as it were, alone with myself for a time. I have sold my racing stable, and resigned from my club.”

A man still young, adorned with such a fine pair of moustaches, and endowed with shadowy, velvety eyes, every glance of which is a caress, never confides in vain in a woman who is a widow of four years' standing, who has met with misfortunes, and sticks to her business without any enthusiasm. Mme. Colacier had not yet abandoned the notion that she was attractive, and proved it by the smile she bestowed upon her new boarder: the smile of a worldly coquette rather than that of a staid business woman.

“Here,” she said, “you might think yourself in the country. We have a garden . . .”

She broke off to scold her boy, Raoul, better known as Boudou, who insisted on stroking the handsome tan boots and spats of the new boarder with a respectful hand.



"Stop that, Boudou. Pray excuse him, Monsieur—he is only five."

"Don't scold him, Madame; he is a dear little chap, and I dote on children."

"I'll be back in a minute. Just time to see to your room: it has been occupied by a Spanish countess, who, it happens, has just left."

The Spanish countess was, in point of fact, M. Folatte, an old music-copyist, who paid less board than the regulars, and was shifted into any room that happened to be vacant. His scanty possessions were transferred to an attic, and Mme. Colacier sprayed the room with white carnation scent, a perfume that seemed to her to render her Spanish countess more plausible. She stuck three anemones in a vase, puffed out her hair with half-a-dozen artificial locks, plastered herself with rice powder and rouge, and went downstairs to Georges Deparville, whom she found busy chattering with Boudou.

"In the morning I get washed," stated Boudou.

"And then?"

Boudou went on to give facts that made Madame Colacier turn pale under her rouge. Her son reminded her of the late Colacier, who was ever bringing out prosaic details of life at the very time she desired him to be correct and distinguished. As for the boarder, he proved to be charming; not only did he not object to the price charged, he did not even inquire what it was to be. And he declared his room was ideal.

"Just at present is the off-season," said Mme. Colacier, "so we have very few people here. M. Folatte, a composer; M. Schweingut, a German financier; Mme. Zolti, an Italian lady, quite a



woman of the world, and Mme. Viallot, and her niece Denise, very rich people from the North. Will you be in for dinner, Monsieur ? ”

Deparville was at dinner, sitting on Mme. Colacier's right. He made a profound impression on the guests. In the course of conversation he managed to state that he painted, sang, played the piano and the violin, and could dance the Mexican Tango. He spoke of his racehorses and his family, members of which occupied prominent positions in the world of art, science, and finance. When, after an hour's chat in the drawing-room, he bade the company good-night, he had won every woman's heart, including that of Mme. Colacier, and that of Mme. Zolti, the Italian lady who ate with her fingers.

The only one who remained silent, not joining in the chorus of praise, was Mme. Viallot. Extremely shrewd in spite of her elephantine stoutness, she watched her niece Denise, and for the first time noted that she was moved and thoughtful. Denise was just twenty, and was very pretty, slender and fair, with the vague glance and short-sight of constant readers. Having recently lost her parents, she had come to Paris to live with her mother's sister. The pair were staying at the boarding-house, while their fine apartment in Victor Hugo Avenue was being made ready for them. In the great city, which both attracted and frightened them, they had no other acquaintances than some distant cousins devoted to their business, and living out near Bercy. To the young girl, Georges Deparville appeared endowed with all the radiant faults which she delighted to find in the heroes of her favourite novels. And she talked of getting a new dress.

While Mme. Colacier let her thoughts dwell upon him as she removed the false hair that weighed her head down, the new boarder, having carefully locked his door, opened his suit case, and extracted therefrom two shirts and a nightshirt, a toothbrush, a pair of slippers, and a huge paving stone wrapped in a napkin, and put in evidently for the purpose of imparting a reassuring weight to the suit case. From his pockets he drew a bottle of hair-dye, thanks to which his moustache and his hair preserved their original shade, and then went to bed with the comfortable sensation that during the hours of night the law could not disturb him.

During the next three days he became the admiration of everyone. He rarely went out before nightfall, and then only for a few minutes, was interested only in reading the papers, and strolled poet-like in the garden. Mme. Zolti declared he suffered from disappointed love, and M. Schweingut inclined to the same belief. M. Folatte was the only grumbler: "I don't like his looks," he said, but that nasty remark was considered to be due to the annoyance he felt at being turned out of his room by so attractive a young man.

Boudou and Denise were both conquered. For the former, Deparville made jacks, whistles and paper-dolls. He courted Denise slyly and respectfully. She felt shy when he let fall upon her his caressing glance, and she was jealous of the others when he gazed at them.

"No one knows who he is or where he comes from," exclaimed Mme. Viallat, exasperated.

"He might say the same thing of us," retorted Denise quietly.

"Everyone knows that you have half-a-million of your own."

"Please, Auntie, let me forget it."

So a romance, a real boarding-house romance was developing in the heavy smell of the dining-room, in the dull drawing-room with its uncomfortable furniture, in the little garden where stunted trees insisted on exhibiting their wretched lack of leaves even in mid-July. Deparville was too clever to tell his love. It was Denise who sought and made opportunities of being alone with him; she endeavoured to discover the secret reasons of his melancholy, and to make this weary man care for life again. She thought him so handsome, so attractive, although he still wore the suit in which he had appeared on the first day.

"I hesitate to send for my furniture and my books," he would say. "I am not sure whether I shall remain here."

And the words were like a stab in Denise's heart.

At last, one Sunday, she thought the hour had come. They were both in the garden. Mme. Colacier, tempted by the lovely day, had gone to some relatives at Fontainebleau. The other boarders were out. Boudou was playing with Denise.

"It would be better fun seeing Punch and Judy, would it not, Boudou?" said Deparville.

Boudou had never gone to see Punch and Judy, though there was one close by. Georges called one of the maids.

"Take him to see Punch. It's my treat."

Denise closed her eyes, filled with surging emotion. She knew what he was going to say. And he said it. He regretted, he said, his empty life—a huge fortune

foolishly spent—but he had never known real regret till quite recently, during the past few days, since a sweet girl had come into his life. If that sweet girl cared for him, he could see a future open before him so splendid, so wonderful . . .

Two hours later they were still exchanging confidences—lovers who paid no heed to the meaning of their words, so deeply were they moved by the sound of their own voices. Suddenly Boudou danced up to them. Still under the spell of the show, he called out:

“Monsieur Georges!”

“Well, what is it?”

“Monsieur Georges! Here’s the policeman! The detective!”

Deparville wasted no time in reflection. He jumped up, grabbed the hat that lay on the bench, rushed off, sprang over the low gate opening at the foot of the garden into a lane—and vanished.

“Gee up!” shouted Boudou.

Denise was thunderstruck. A dreadful presentiment froze her blood, and she breathed no word of what had occurred.

That evening the new boarder did not turn up to dinner, neither did he return to go to bed. The next day his room was searched, and all that was found were the two shirts, the night-shirt, the slippers, the tooth-brush, the bottle of hair-dye, and the paving stone. And no one could make head or tail of the explanation Boudou stammered out:

“I went to see Punch. And then I saw Punch hit the policeman with his big stick, and then I wanted to be Punch, and I called out to Monsieur Georges: ‘Here’s the policeman! Here’s the detective!’ And then he jumped up and ran, and ran . . .”



## XXII

### GOBETTE'S DIARY

BEFORE saying good-bye, M. Leopold Farinel, lacking elegance in his dress, though not in his manner, shy notwithstanding his big chest and beard, said carelessly to his little friend, Gobette:

"When I have gone, look in your chiffonier; you will find something I have put there in remembrance of your birthday."

"I am in no great hurry," remarked Gobette.

And she gave him the kind of kiss that seems to push you out of the door.

"There," said M. Farinel at the door, "don't thank me; I am always your debtor. Do people imagine that they have requited the rose for its perfume when they have placed it in a precious vase?"

And he took himself off on that poetic note.

"Josephine!" called Gobette, "let us go and have a look at what Consul has brought me."

She had thus nicknamed M. Farinel after the celebrated ape. No doubt he had brought her something splendid in the way of jewellery. When the maid went into raptures at the idea, Gobette snubbed her:

"Well, what is there in that? Just now he himself was saying something like this: 'If I give you perfume, do you think you repay me for it by bringing me a vase?'"

"Very true, Madame," replied Josephine, who did not always fathom the enigmatic speeches sometimes indulged in by her mistress.

At this point young Raoul Lecaleur presented himself carrying a bulky parcel.

"Good business!" cried Gobette exultingly. "It's big enough, anyhow. What have you got for me this time, you darling? How hot and thirsty you must be! Will you have a drink? You do love me, don't you? Where are the scissors? I'm dying to know what's in it! I adore you! Kiss me then. . . . You smell of vervain: where have you been, you little rascal? The scissors! What a monster of a box!"

Young Raoul Lecaleur, smiling at all this hurry and impatience, undid the parcel. Although he was hardly out of his boyhood, and although in his slim figure, his highly-strung nerves, his downy cheeks and his hair gummed together by brilliantine, he exemplified the exact type of the modern young man, he unknotted the string, and raised the paper wrappings with the precise and exact aptitude of a methodical, experienced shopman.

"It's something in the furniture way," cried Gobette. "How lovely! What is it for?"

"It's a writing-desk," answered Raoul. "I puzzled my brains to get you something useful, something that will last. It's made of amaranth wood, and covered with morocco. Genuine eighteenth century. I know all about such things:



it must have belonged to some duchess. Here in the stand are three little ink-pots, for which I have brought blue, violet and red ink. Inside you will find a stock of notepaper, that matches the . . ."

"I want to write at once! Josephine! Josephine! See what Monsieur has brought me! Amaranth, belonged to a princess, genuine eighteenth century! I must write on it. Get me my account book."

Raoul turned pale, and having sent away Josephine:

"My dear girl," he gasped, "your want of taste surprises me. A desk like that is not used for kitchen accounts."

"What do you want me to write, then?"

"I hardly know . . . You have a packet of lovely notepaper; take a sheet . . . I have it! Keep a diary."

"What's that?"

"Why, every evening you amuse yourself by jotting down what's happened in the day."

"Nothing ever happens . . ."

"Well, you put down all you have seen, noticed, felt . . . You have then a faithful confidante—the more faithful because the desk has a strong little padlock—gold, you see. It's a capital notion, your keeping a diary. All fashionable young ladies do it, and when you have got into the habit of it, you'll keep on . . . See, I write on the first page: *Gobette's Diary*."

"I'm not good at writing, dear boy . . ."

"You'll always be good enough for what you want to say. There now, see how she pouts! Is that how you encourage me to bring you presents?"

"I love your presents because I love you. I will begin writing my memoirs to-morrow, I promise. Meanwhile, sit down and say nice things to me . . ."

"I bought that desk at a famous antiquary's . . ."

The next evening Gobette commenced her diary :

*Sept.* 2.—I awoke at noon. When I awake at noon I have what you may call a sinking in the stomach. I always fancy that somebody is going to scold me. That feeling lasts until I have had a cup of hot coffee. Laundress's bill: 65 francs, 65 centimes. Fine day. Knock off the centimes. Plans for the future: to live together with my Raoul. To buy, at Fenouille's, the tulle mantle edged with chinchilla, and kept up with two strips of chinchilla interspersed with pearls and sapphires.

Consul to breakfast. He talked to me about his youthful escapades, and about a certain little baggage who was his first fancy, and who danced the "chachut," the tango not being known then. I thought of Raoul, who was perhaps playing the same game with me, and the tears came into my eyes. He did not ask me why. Consul has his faults, but he never bothers one with foolish questions. He called me his little girl, and said I should tell him my troubles, for he had come to a time of life when a man who has never been understood by women begins to understand them. Idiot! I blew my nose, wiped my eyes, and looked at the clock. Whenever I look at the clock, he gets up to go. He may have his faults, but he is considerate. When he comes upstairs, I mistake his step for Raoul's; when he goes down, it is heavy, very heavy . . . He is only really old when he is away from me . . .

Josephine said, to me: "Has there been some trouble with Consul?" I answered: "Let it be understood that I call him Consul because I have worries with him, but you who have nothing but tips will oblige me by calling him Monsieur." Ill-mannered creature! One wonders what sort of people she was with before she came here.

Tea at four. Lucienne, Maud and Rosette. Those three animals came eaten up with jealousy. I showed them my presents. Spiteful talk. Rosette told me that the desk cost fifty-nine francs, and came out of a draper's shop. "Or out of a waiting-room, perhaps," I suggested, knowing that she was once an attendant at such a place at Marseilles. I have only enemies for my friends, there's no mistake about that.

Dinner with my Raoul at a restaurant. It would seem that anything in the way of broth is called Potage, that fillet of beef must not be spoken of as "old cow" when it is asked for, and that the waiter is a *maître d'hôtel*. Some idiot made sheep's eyes at me; Raoul declared that it was my fault. I love Raoul when we are alone, but it is trying to go out with him. He began again about his desk, which he said cost him fifty louis. As the son of a business man, Raoul is keen about prices. With him, dinners don't last long: after the meat course he orders dessert for two, because his legs are cramped, so he says. Taxi. I wanted to be petted. I would have given my new hat, that with the drooping plume, for a fond word . . . But I have noticed that it is only those we love who do not speak to us of love . . .

At ten, all alone. Telephoned to Consul, so that I might have at least one little disinterested word

of kindness. I had it. Consul lives in an old apartment in an old house, with an old cook and an old valet. He was in bed, asleep, and dreaming of me. Through the telephone he has the voice of youth; he does not stammer, as he does when he is dangling round my skirts. I could spend hours in listening to him. He has admirable tact in these conversations, and even when he speaks of himself I feel that he is speaking of me. The telephone girl cut us off . . . How bored I am . . .

Such was the opening chapter of Gobette's diary. On reading it over, she experienced a shock that caused her to reflect seriously for the first time in her life. Her impressions, thus crudely set down in black and white, had an alarming appearance. One lived, then, to an accompaniment of restaurant-music in a world of preconceived opinions and anticipated sensations. One spent money, and one spent oneself, without every trying to make the account balance. And then . . .

"Well, here we are!" cried Raoul, making his appearance. But Gobette shrugged her shoulders.

"All is over between us—is that it?" sniggered the young man, feeling sure of his ground.

"That's it," answered Gobette.

He was ready to sink with astonishment.

"And why?"

"The writing-desk's why."

"The writing-desk?"

"And the diary . . ."

"Perhaps you will explain?"

She made a little movement of weariness. What was the use? However:

"When I write down what I think, and

read over what is written," she observed, "you have no idea of the effect produced. It's as if one photographed one's own sadness. It's no use complaining. You shouldn't have taught me to discover my real thoughts . . ."



## XXIII

### FAMISHED

M. LE CAPRICARD had still left to him, in this out-of-the-way corner of Normandy, an old farmhouse that leant to one side, a field planted with apple trees, a stunted little garden, a rose bush that produced a single rose, a pair of boots, and, among his tattered rustic clothes, a frock-coat.

On the eighth of July he dressed himself with unusual care ; he shaved his thin face grooved with those deep indentations which run from the nose to the corners of the lips, that good folks call " trouble-tracks " ; he put on his boots, invested himself in his least dilapidated trousers, brushed his frock-coat very gingerly, got into it, hastened to the rose tree, plucked the single overblown rose, and put it in his buttonhole, muttering : " If only it holds together ! " Lastly, he covered the place where a collar ought to be with a neckcloth. Thus, with battered hat cocked boldly, a tall, erect dried-up figure, he strolled along with the impatient air and the feverish glance of a young man keeping his first assignation. Something, however, was lacking. He tapped his forehead, and hunted out a half-



smoked cigar from an envelope. Then he sat down on a stone bench in front of the porch, crossed his inordinately long legs in negligent attitude, and smoked.

On every eighth of July for thirty years M. le Capricard had gone through the same performance. In all that time he had consumed only three cigars, while the boots, the hat and the neckcloth were the same. For it was on this day that Pauline passed on her way to the manor-house. Pauline was no other than Mme. Mirly-Buhu, *née* Briot. And M. Le Capricard, when he was young and rich, though not handsome, had asked her hand in marriage without consulting her inclination, conceiving that she was one of those who rely upon their parents for the choosing of a husband.

"The child," her mother had answered, "is as good as engaged to M. Mirly-Buhu of Paris."

Upon which he relinquished his suit, an embittered man, and never renewed it. His pride was so deeply hurt that he hardly suffered otherwise; and he would have been astonished if anyone had told him that the wound which had been inflicted would be lasting and incurable. He tried to console himself in the arms of a peasant girl, who did not live long, but left him a son whom he had legalised as his heir. The son grew up to young manhood, and dissipated his entire estate down to the last centime. Ruined, he shut himself up in his farmhouse, and lived as a country squire on the occasional and insufficient pittances sent him by his son, who never prospered, and was niggardly.

And not a day passed in all these thirty years but M. Le Capricard thought of Pauline. Every summer when she came to spend some weeks in the

country, he had seen her, fair, blooming and elegantly attired, holding the arm of M. Mirly-Buhu, small, coarse-grained and self-satisfied, with loose, hanging lip, and the bulky back of the man of business. He had seen her as a young mother, he had seen her as a grandmother. M. Mirly-Buhu still hugged himself ; his lip hung looser than ever ; his back had become the enormous, contented back of an independent person, who is much too rich, and much too fond of his dinner . . .

M. Le Capricard sulked within doors for the most part.

He had never desired to resume his social relations with his neighbours. He was one of those who love, or grieve, for life. Life seemed to him to run in a straight and simple groove, and an unreturned passion might tinge it with beauty. It was enough for him, as July the eighth came round, to wait for the great people as they passed to their country seat. When the carriage came slowly by, for the road rose steeply, he got up and bowed coldly and gravely—the bow of a man of the world. Pauline returned it with a smile ; her husband touched his hat . . . There were children in the carriage, and grandchildren . . . On the following day M. Le Capricard sent a boy with his card, for he knew the usages of society, and conformed to them. A veritable poem, this card ! It was composed of thick pasteboard, was glazed like the backs of certain playing-cards, and had the appearance of yellow ivory ; on it was written, in a fine running hand : “ Louis-Eugene-Michel Le Capricard,” the name being surmounted by a vague heraldic design. In return for this, a footman left M. Mirly-Buhu’s card. And that was all.

M. Le Capricard spent the rest of his time as do the lions and eagles: he was on the look out for food. It was said in that part of the country that any animal, be it what it might, that found its way into his poverty-stricken enclosure, was an animal doomed to die. Evil tongues asserted that he feasted for two days on Tomeo, Mlle. Tingret the linen-draper's aged cat, and that he caught sparrows in traps. Sometimes the hollow report of a gun was heard in his garden. The authorities, pitiful because of the circumstances, were deaf to the sound. M. Le Capricard was the only destitute person in the district; for the poorest had at least an abundance of chick-pease and bacon, and could sometimes afford themselves a more elaborate repast as a treat. To see him go by, with his prominent yellow teeth, gaunt and melancholy, gave one the shudders. He devoured rats when no game, wounded by his neighbours, crept into his grounds to die. And it was remarked that the animals, who are not so stupid as some suppose, fled at the sight of him, and that the trees in his garden were no longer vocal with the song of birds.

Mme. Mirly-Buhu used all her gentle influence to soften these malicious accounts. Once she had looked on her admirer as grotesque; now she associated him with a memory that had the sweetness and tenderness of regret. He had embodied the poetry of her youth—its only poetry. On the eighth of July she would dress herself up for the occasion.

"Look," M. Mirly-Buhu would cry jocosely, "it is in honour of her lover!"

"And suppose it is," she would sigh, "at least he still looks thin enough!"

"By Jove, yes! With nothing but cat to eat!"

Their children would laugh. Their grandchildren—Jean and Hubert—laughed when they were old enough to understand. They called M. Le Capricard "Grandma's sweetheart." They were two insufferable brats about twelve years old. The eldest had already the drooping lip and bulky back of M. Mirly-Buhu.

The family came in a motor-car this time, a motor-car recently acquired, and large enough to accommodate the whole family. At the foot of the incline, Mme. Mirly-Buhu called to the chauffeur:

"Cyprien, drive very slowly."

She thought that it would be a heart-breaking thing for the watcher to see her rush by in this new kind of vehicle. She smiled as she saw him in the distance at his post, shading his eyes with his hand. But he was expecting a landau, and motor-cars go fast even when the chauffeur has orders to slow down; besides, M. Le Capricard's sight was, no doubt, failing. He let the car pass, and only became aware of his oversight a moment afterwards. Then he called a lad from the neighbouring farm, and gave him his last ten-centime piece to leave his card at the manor-house.

"And I have always arranged to come on the eighth of July, to the very day, so that his poor rose should not be quite withered!" sighed Mme. Mirly-Buhu.

"We will hit on something to make up for it," said the youthful Hubert. "Leave it to me; I have an idea of my own."

"Myself all over again at his age!" exclaimed M. Mirly-Buhu with admiration. "I used to invent tricks, practical jokes . . ."

"I hope he does not mean to play any tricks. You would not, my dear child, would you?" said his grandmother wistfully. "We should be charitable with the unfortunate . . . and this poor creature, with all his grand airs, goes hungry every day . . ."

Meanwhile, M. Le Capricard, having divested himself of his fine clothes, folded them up abstractedly and carefully. There was a little catch in his breath—a stifled sob, like a bark cut short. He was hungry. In spite of his pressing letters: "My boy, I assure you that my distress is very great; I am in urgent need," his son had not sent him anything, and there had been fine weather in which it was impossible to trap sparrows. Certain bones remained from yesterday's dinner, and these he put in boiling water, making a thin broth. He supped up this without appeasing the hunger that gnawed at his vitals. True, he had a little store of roots and fruits which he could cut up and cook; but he had a craving for animal food, the craving of the wild beast that almost made him howl . . .

He went out and took up his post, gun in hand, at the end of the garden. There was an opening there through which game from the Mirly-Buhu estate sometimes made its appearance. He would watch for it. When people watch they have hope, and when they have hope they suffer less. He watched in such an agony of suspense, with such tension of every faculty, that the least rustle of leaves made him believe in something which turned out to be nothing . . .

But at last—oh, miracle!—he saw the cocked ears of a fine rabbit, which, after some skipping

movements, seated itself before the very feet of the motionless human form. It was a rabbit, and it belonged to Mirly-Buhu, but he should look after his own property--the fool! What came on the land owned by Le Capricard belonged to him by the law of acquisition--also by the law of necessity. Not that he stopped to think it over. With a savage leap he sprang upon the rabbit. As he held it up to give it the hand-blow that kills instantly, he perceived that the creature had a string attached to its leg . . . And at the end of the string was tied a small knuckle of ham . . .

M. Le Capricard turned deadly pale. So his miserable state of destitution was guessed at; they were making fun of him; they were sending this ridiculous gift by way of charity . . . What diabolical ingenuity on the part of Mirly-Buhu to degrade him in the eyes of Pauline! He went indoors, again, donned his boots, breeches and frock-coat, and was soon ringing at the gate of the manor-house. He intended to give the rabbit and the knuckle to one of the servants with some scathing remark. But as soon as the gate opened, he found himself in the midst of the family, who were lunching in the garden.

"Monsieur," he said, "see what came into my garden just now . . ."

Mme. Mirly-Buhu divined what had happened.

"It must be some cruel game of those little wretches! What an odd idea of amusement! The rabbit must have got away from them and taken refuge in your garden . . ."

M. Mirly-Buhu added, giving the subject of offence into the hands of the butler:

"I am not altogether sorry for this since it



procures us the honour of your visit. Will you, my good neighbour, give us the pleasure of your company and partake without ceremony of our meal? . . .”

On the table was an enormous joint of roast beef, and there were fried potatoes, radishes and cucumbers, and little golden-crustcd rolls and decanters of sparkling wine . . . Involuntarily, M. Le Capricard took a step forward towards all these good things, and towards Pauline's smile of welcome. Then he drew himself up, and with a bow that indicated his departure :

“ Thank you,” he said, “ but I have just finished my coffee.”



## XXIV

### THE BEGGING LETTER

MONSIEUR CRABETTE presented himself before his wife, his heels together, in the attitude of a very good little old child.

"There," said he, "I have tied my little cravat myself; my little shoes are quite clean; I have brushed my little overcoat and my little hat, and I have my little fountain pen in my pocket. Ah! I was forgetting my little despatch-case."

He was in the habit of appearing humble in order to soften the majestic Mme. Crabette, whose large form overflowed from a dark red kimono. She deigned to smile.

"And you are off to your little job?"

"Yes, darling."

She looked him over with the severity of a nurse. He really did look distinguished, with his grey curly hair falling on his neck, a beard like a prophet's, and a head rather too large for the thin body, but which betokened a man of letters, a poet, in fact.

"You will do," she said at last. "Have you made up your mind to ask him for your money? If so, put on your gloves, and as soon as you are

shown into the room, say to him: 'Monsieur Madineau, I have been working for you for the last ten days. I have already finished a chapter of the novel which will bear your name. Please, therefore, give me my fifty francs.' "

"Not so loud, dear. I have already explained to you that I am merely collaborating, straightening out his sentences . . . "

" 'Give me my fifty francs.' And you will add: 'It is not that I am in pressing need of the money. Fortunately, my wife, who was a Corbignac, has money of her own, but what is due is due.' You hear me? Speak right out and look straight at him. The reason you have never earned your living properly is that you seem always to be begging for your daily bread, while other men demand jam on it as well, demand it! It is bad enough to be working to make other people's reputations, and the least they can do is to keep their promises, but you, with your little frock-coat and your fountain-pen, you always have a deprecating look, and so you are exploited. I have only eight hundred francs a year, it is true, but if you were not so stupidly modest, people would think we had eight thousand, and you would not need to slave, as you do now, for men who use you for their own benefit."

M. Crabette took his medicine and went off to breathe the intoxicating air of freedom. To reach his destination more quickly, he went by the Metropolitan, got out in a remote quarter, walked a long way, and entered a small café. Three men were waiting for him, the kind of men that seemed to grow on benches and to stick like limpets to marble-topped tables. They welcomed him with diverse calls:

"Lazy beggar! Couldn't get up this morning, eh? Had to fool with that wife of his! And they say there is no such thing as love nowadays!"

"Good-morning, Messieurs," murmured M. Crabette. "I will have a small anisette."

If only Mme. Crabette, *née* Corbignac, could have seen him! While she supposed him bowed over humble tasks, he was having a game of bridge, thoroughly enjoying it, far from anyone who knew him, with three idiots who were past masters at the game. It was indeed delightful. Everything was just right; the liquor he sipped, the cards that felt smooth to his fingers, the dog of the establishment rubbing itself against his legs, the cashier who smiled at him, the landlord who watched the play. There he reigned, through the superiority of his artistic head rather than through his works, which no one wanted to read. He would have liked to be a man of letters, but he hated writing. He did not see any satisfaction in bending, at his age, over a sheet of white paper, in writing on it, in copying what he had written; indeed, work had never given him any enjoyment. He was in the habit of coming to this place every day, stopping from ten till noon, and from four till seven, to play at bridge or dominoes.

As his wife's small income was insufficient for their needs, he increased it in the following manner: he had drawn up a list of writers from whom he regularly solicited loans. M. Crabette was, in fact, nothing more nor less than a begging-letter writer. He sponged with soft grace and exquisite touch, always finding new victims when it occurred to one of his clients to kick him out or to die. He was versed in all the

formulæ that can move, knew the psychological moments, overawed servants with his imposingly dignified air, and thanks to this game, he made both ends meet. As regards Mme. Crabette, he yarned, without entering into details, telling her that he spent his time in ill-paid, obscure work for the masters of literature: writing an article for this one, making researches for another, doing for a third some chapters of a novel. The good lady consequently supposed that all successful writers employed mysterious helpers, and was surprised that her husband never worked on his own account.

"You ought to be glad I do not," he would answer, "for that enables me to devote myself to you and to have a satisfactory business, while if I were doing creative work for myself, I should have been compelled to be unfaithful to my poor darling, and to make myself acquainted with the sensations of gambling, drink, and debauch."

So M. Crabette led a triple life, now a worthy citizen at home, now a gambler at the café, and now a beggar in various houses.

He emptied his last taste of anisette while M. Becouen, the tinsmith, made up the accounts. M. Crabette had lost the drinks and thirty-five centimes, which he produced without a murmur. Then he called for a blotter and writing paper and drew up the following petition:—

Monsieur Madineau :

Dear Sir,

This is the appeal of an unknown brother-writer. You are the dawn, I am the twilight, as Victor Hugo wrote to me in 1883, and with

all due reservation, of course. I see in the papers that you have become engaged to be married, and I am emboldened on this day of happiness to lay before you the plea of an author who finds himself unable to pay his rent. Just as you yourself, Monsieur Madineau and dear Maître, hung on the lips of the lady you are about to marry when awaiting her stupendous "yes," so I await your reply—in your ante-room, so as not to disturb you.

I address myself to your heart, sure of its response, and I remain your very devoted and admiring fellow-writer.

He signed his name, and slipped the paper into a thin yellow envelope. Thereafter he took the Metropolitan again and made for Victor Hugo Avenue. The appearance of the house filled him with agreeable trustfulness. He flipped the dust from his coat and addressed the concierge in the proper way, that is, instead of "Is M. Madineau in?" which invariably brought out a distrustful and usually negative reply, he launched a "I hope M. Madineau has not gone out yet?"

And receiving an amiable "No, sir, not yet," he went on as if he were a friend:

"By the way, which floor? I never can recollect."

"The second above the ground floor, the door on the right."

Thus was the first difficulty overcome. The manservant was the next. M. Crabette drew himself up and fluffed out his hair.

"Please give this to your master," he said with a fine air of authority, as he held out his letter.

"I do not want to bother him to-day, so I shall wait for the answer here."

Delightful moment of expectation! How much would it be? Twenty-five francs? Fifty francs? Perhaps a hundred . . .

The man returned empty-handed.

"M. Madineau told me to say that he has no heart."

"Is that a joke?"

"Well, sir, that is what Monsieur told me to say—you never know when he is joking."

"I shall call again, though it is a bother, for I live at a distance."

As he returned, he was busy inventing the story he would have to tell Mme. Crabette. He did not throw the fault of his failure on the novelist's meanness; he thought it due to his letter not having been the right sort of appeal. He was a sportsman of experience, and did not blame the game when his shot missed fire.

Meanwhile, M. Léon Madineau was entertaining his fiancée, who was accompanied by a kindly aunt. Marie-Louise had insisted on visiting her future husband's study. She settled her aunt in an arm-chair, and began to look at everything, opening books, rummaging among papers, and expressing her opinion on the sentence which her arrival had interrupted. She behaved like a spoiled child whom everyone excused because she had a dowry of half a million. While she was looking through the papers on the desk, she came upon M. Crabette's letter and read it.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, "the poor man! How much did you give him?"

"But . . ."

"Did you give him anything?"



"You see . . ."

"We must take him something at once. Fifty francs each. Let us go quickly. He may have committed suicide by this time. Aunt can wait in the carriage. Do hurry. I shall not sleep a wink to-night."

It was Mme. Crabette who admitted them.

"You are M. Madineau," she grumbled. "Come in, and your daughter, too. I am not sorry to see you. Sit down. Thank heaven, I have got hold of one of you at last, and I can tell you just what I think of you . . ."

"Madame . . ."

"No, you must listen to me: M. Madineau, I have no objection to my husband writing your novels for you, since it appears to be the custom among writers. Silence! I will speak! And I have nothing to say to your keeping my husband until two o'clock, as you have done this afternoon: I do not interfere with that, I am only a woman. But when you rely upon the discretion of a man, the least that can be done is to pay him for it, M. Madineau. And to pay him promptly, on the day the money is due, and without humming and hawing about it either. But here comes my husband; I have nothing more to say . . ."

Thereupon she left the room. Fearfully upset, Léon was too angry to speak. Fearing to say a word lest he should be overheard by his wife, he touched his forehead to indicate that the unfortunate woman was not in her right mind, and gazed at the ceiling with a piteous smile.

"You are nothing but a blackmailer," shouted M. Madineau. "And this is not going to be the end of it. Come away, Marie-Louise."



And as they went down the stairs, he said to her :

“ I swear to you . . . ”

But Marie-Louise interrupted him with a most angelic air :

“ It does not in the least matter, darling. I quite understand that if you had to write every word of your books you would have no time to travel . . . Pray calm yourself . . . You may be sure I do not love you one bit less. How can I explain . . . It's the same with father. He has people who work for him, but that does not prevent his being a great manufacturer.”

## XXV

### THE FALSE NOTE

IT was a stage marriage, but not a marriage of the stage. Luc Bierville was famous in his way, but he belonged to the type of actor that retains middle-class principles in spite of everything. Betty Decambre was in the spring-time of eighteen when she married him, which is equivalent to saying that he was about twenty years her senior. An austere mother took a delight in standing sentinel over her virtue.

It was on the first night of *Cliquette* that the engagement took place. While the notes of the violins died away amid the complaining murmurs of the harp and the poetic serenity of a moonlit night, Luc had to clasp Betty tenderly to his heart and appear to imprint on her forehead a chaste kiss. His back was turned to the audience, and Bierville's embrace was a very real one. Until that moment he had seemed indifferent, even cold, to the poor little débutante: and despite the preoccupations of a first appearance, she was ready to faint with emotion as she realised what he had done. To prevent a catastrophe, he had to rap her knuckles and say something smart.

“ You don’t like it, my little friend ? That only proves your bad taste ! ”

This supposed witticism became a sort of traditional catchword ; and in obscure parts of the country, companies playing *Cliquette* repeat it to this day, without suspecting the idyllic circumstances which gave rise to it.

The austere mother, who had watched these proceedings from the wings, appeared before Bierville bristling with indignation. She followed him into his dressing-room.

“ This kind of thing won’t do. I would rather take the child away from the stage altogether and starve to death, than see her go the way I went. To think of the lovers I have had, and not a man left to take care of me now ! M’sieur Bierville, mark what I say : Betty shall not disgrace my name . . . ”

Luc undressed himself with serene impudence. As the other was about to continue, he stopped her with a majestic wave of his bare arm :

“ I’m going to marry her,” he announced.

A quarter-of-an-hour afterwards the news became official, and champagne flowed freely. It was agreed that they were a charming pair : she, so fair, so slender, with little tip-tilted nose, pouting lips and irreproachable manners : he, so tall, so stalwart, so well set-up, with a face peculiar to Roman coins and a certain class of coachmen.

The glorious honeymoon that was theirs ! They lived in a perpetual embrace, as if the loving couple in *Cliquette* had become a reality. He loved her, as often happens at first, with an airy confidence, without a doubt as to the depth of his feeling. She was dreadfully jealous of her celebrated husband.

When they returned home, it was no longer Betty Decambre, the little opera-singer, but Mme. Bierville, who attended to the housekeeping and her husband, and only studied her parts or visited her dressmaker when her household duties had been fulfilled, the account-books were in order, and the meals ordered. Her infatuation blinded her to everything else, and made her cruel enough to say to her mother :

"Don't come to the house any more. Your moustache makes a bad impression on him . . . in the end he will imagine that I shall be like you some day."

He accepted this unceasing devotion with placid self-approval. Men who are satisfied that they are worshipped grow fat and dull-witted. That happened to Luc.

Thus it was that he came to the age of forty-eight without any misgiving as to Betty's being only twenty-seven. He still played juvenile leads ; he had retained his commanding personality and his powerful voice, but people noticed that he was in a hurry to get back to his slippers and his homely supper of tripe or steak. And then the eternal stage love-couple, and the eternal Betty ! As her husband had figured on the stage for thirty years, it was inferred that she herself must be at least forty. The public got tired of them. Not that she did not look young. She had the unfailing freshness peculiar to brunettes who are made up as blondes, and her doll-like face had not changed at all.

They had to go on tour, and their experiences embittered them. There were catastrophic nights when the manager announced the receipts with

insolvency written on his face. They were reduced to playing comedy parts, but they had the head-voices of operette-singers in speaking their lines, and they failed to please.

The final blow came when, during one of their sojourns in Paris, Betty had the offer of an engagement.

"And I?" asked Bierville of the manager. "Where do I come in?"

"How the devil do I know? You had better rest for a time . . . you will be all the better for it . . ."

"Oh, I'm in no need of a rest. I'll apply elsewhere."

Elsewhere they bowed him to the door. Betty's engagement being a good one, he had to accept the situation, and attended his wife's rehearsals, which he watched, as a virtuoso, in ironic silence. His enforced idleness weighed heavily on him. And who was it that had stepped into his shoes? Charvel, one of those tenors of the new school who always give one the impression of caricature; a girl-faced boy, superfluously amiable, with hair too elaborately arranged, complexion too lily-and-rose, slimness too willowy, gracefulness carried to an extreme. A cherub materialised, and singing, "Father mine, fondness thine" with the throat-voice so dear to Montmartre.

At first Luc found him merely ridiculous, and imitated him with ponderous banter for the entertainment of his wife. Then he observed that Betty did not seem to appreciate these pleasantries, and that she was often thoughtful and dreamy. And suddenly the scales fell from his eyes. Yes, she was still considerate, still attentive to her

duties ; but merely from habit, without the pleasure, the enthusiasm, of other days. Idiot that he was not to have noticed it ! She always called him " my dearest," as if she were saying " old boy." She no longer kissed him except on the forehead ; - she was no longer jealous.

It was he who was jealous now ; so desperately jealous that he did not know whether to box this Charvel's ears or to throttle him. But what was he to do ? Betty's behaviour was quite correct in every way ; and the other treated her with respect and called him Bierville, " Maestro " . . .

And yet hour by hour Betty seemed to be slipping away from him. She said one day when he was present : " Charvel, that fat red-haired woman is always writing to you, isn't she ? " and in her eyes was the look of anguish and jealousy he had himself so often caused in bygone days. And so it became the banal, but very terrible tragedy—a wife ceasing to love her old husband. Wags made funny jokes about it, but having played so long in operettas, Bierville took it all very seriously indeed. It is an old saying that actors remain children to the last. Bierville showed no fight ; he took it lying down and in tears. And Betty, who at her *début* had adopted a smile which had become stereotyped, found, on coming home, a broken-spirited, querulous man, with swollen eyelids and a red nose . . .

One evening, full of pity, she kissed him : " Go and see Reybourg to-morrow morning ; he has some good news for you." She would not explain herself.

Reybourg was the manager. He welcomed Bierville with a pleasant smile.

“ Ah, here is the Maestro. Look here, my dear Maestro, we are going to reproduce *Cliquette* . . . under the original title.”

Original title ! The operetta seemed to Bierville a piece that was still quite new, a thing of yesterday . . .

“ As for the parts of the young lovers—hang it, man, there’s a little too much of you for that ! I give Beppo to Charvel. You will play the old shepherd.”

“ Never ! ”

“ Yes, yes, we shall consider it settled.”

To surrender to a hated rival the part in which he had won his laurels ! To don the smock and dirty white wig of the old shepherd ! To come down to taking on the stage-business which theatrical slang calls “ clowning ! ” Nevertheless, Bierville accepted the part for the sake of being in the company, of being there. Besides, there was one really good scene which he could do something with. But on the evening of the dress rehearsal, when he saw Charvel clasp Betty in his arms he could have sobbed ; but he had to enter at that moment . . .

Charvel’s success was phenomenal. The dress-makers and modistes were there, and dressmakers have a weakness for an elegant and well-dressed young man.

The final test took place the following night. The moment came for the duet.

Then the young tenor failed in a way that no audience pardons. Not strong enough for the part, there was a terrible break in his voice, one of those squeaks that set the gallery laughing and elicit murmurs from the orchestra stalls. In his charming



green and crushed-strawberry coat, his leg exquisitely displayed by cream silk stockings, and his mouth drawn into a pucker, he stood there faltering out the phrases and driving the prompter and the musical director to distraction. "

"Bierville, it's up to you!"

Bierville felt that it was one of those moments when happiness is to be won. Looking noble in his shepherd's rags, he took the stage, and sang in a voice so confident, so comprehensive, so compelling, that the whole house rose to him . . . Charvel, in his green and crimson, disappeared into the shadows of the wings.

And when the veteran singer, intoxicated, half mad with joy, sweating triumph from every pore, got back to his dressing-room, he found Betty waiting for him, very pale and looking as if she had just awakened from a dream. And as the lingering volleys of applause died away she threw her arms round his neck, drew to her lips the worn face furrowed with lines not wholly the work of art, and whispered:

"My dear old hero, there's nobody like you!"



## XXVI

### BIG BUSINESS

AFTER strolling in the foyer, M., Mme. and Mlle. Gouverneur were about to return to their seats in the upper circle, when someone called in a loud voice :

“Gustave !”

M. Gouverneur turned in astonishment.

“Ah, by Jove ! Berthe, let me introduce my friend Feutrier, whom I have often spoken of . . . Feutrier, my daughter Marie-Louise . . . Who would have thought it ? You have not changed since—how long is it ? Seventeen years ? This life in Paris, how it separates people ! Berthe, my friend Feutrier and myself were fellow-clerks at Hundsohn’s. A rotten time that, eh, Feutrier ? But it hasn’t prevented you from making your way to the top. Ah, sly dog ! Your name is in everybody’s mouth. A great financier ! But you have not changed a bit. As for me, I have filled out.”

As a matter of fact, Feutrier had shrivelled up in the hard game of money-making. His thin moustache, which he was constantly biting, seemed

to be fair rather than white, and his eyes gleamed feverishly under his care-worn brows. M. Gouverneur, on the contrary, had grown stout in an easy job at a modest salary. He was florid, and his frock-coat fitted him badly; while the other, pale and high-strung, with an opera-hat unduly large tilted on one side of his head, a faultless coat, a magnificent pearl in his shirt front, played nervously with a dandified cane. The admiring outburst of M. Gouverneur flattered him.

"Will you come into my box?" he suggested. "I am alone."

"We should be ungrateful to refuse," said M. Gouverneur. "Up there one is dazzled by the light in one's eyes, though one hears as well, if not better. Sound ascends."

But M. Feutrier hurried them along with an air of good-natured patronage.

"Come then—my wife never joins me when I go to the theatre. She is supposed to be suffering from an internal complaint. Nerves, *I* say, and nothing else! But she has so pestered the doctors that at last they performed an operation to satisfy her. So I take a box for myself. I like amusement well enough, but I prefer to be alone. When there is no box to be had, I take four stalls, one for myself, one on the right and left of me, and one in front . . ."

He saw them to their seats, and went off in quest of bonbons.

"We are out of place here," grumbled Marie-Louise. "My poor silk dress . . ."

"Young people are all right wherever they are," said her mother reprovingly.

Feutrier now returned with a box of preserved

tangerines in one hand, and a packet of caramels in the other. He placed them on the ledge of the box with the complaisance of a worthy doctor bestowing wine and dainties on the sick poor.

"Here is all I could obtain. A miserable buffet! I have left my card with a line to the manager asking him to come and see me one of these days. I will rent it from him, this buffet of his, and run it myself! And I promise you I will make something of it."

"Everything you touch turns to gold," observed Gouverneur.

"It's like their play," continued Feutrier. "I would have introduced, in six costumes with padded tights . . ."

He did not say what, for the curtain had just gone up. After a little while he took his friend to the back of the box, to give him his ideas upon matters theatrical. M. Gouverneur, distracted between desire to see the play and the fear of not honouring his host, twisted his neck, screwed up his eyes, could make nothing of the show, answered at haphazard, and felt the beginnings of an atrocious headache incubating in his brain. At the conclusion of the performance, Feutrier proposed taking them to supper.

"Impossible!" exclaimed Gouverneur. "On account of Marie-Louise."

"We are not going to Montmartre! Same old Gouverneur! You never cared to leave the beaten track."

"If M. Feutrier would give us the pleasure of his company at dinner next Sunday . . ." suggested Mme. Gouverneur.

He accepted this invitation, and came the following

Sunday, in a dress-jacket with a carnation in his button-hole, a little winded by having to climb to the fifth floor.

"You see," said Gouverneur, "we are very comfortable up here. Hang it, it's not a grand place, but there's a splendid view. You will find us a happy family, content with little, like Jenny, the factory girl. I draw now three hundred and seventy-five francs a month at Langoulacque and Co.'s. A modest salary, you will say . . ."

M. Feutrier interrupted him :

"Hear him with his modest salary ! Unhappy man ! This passion for a fixed income, for little work and much leisure, without responsibilities, without initiative, will simply, my good fellow, be the ruin of France. Just now business is humming in all directions. You have only to stoop down to pick up money. A man of your ability . . ."

"Dinner's ready," announced the maid familiarly.

"Don't expect a great banquet," said M. Gouverneur. "My wife attends to the cooking."

But M. Feutrier persisted :

"I repeat, a man of your ability . . . You are too modest ; you let yourself become hide-bound. What you want is something in the way of big business . . . Stop . . . By Jove, that's it . . . I've got it !"

"Oh, Monsieur Feutrier !" gasped Mme. Gouverneur, frightened.

"Stop ! Leave him to me. I take him under my wing. Just now I'm in need of someone who is level-headed, reliable and tactful. You will represent at Paris the mining operations that are going on at Ferraguz . . . I was hesitating

about it ; now I have made up my mind. I will buy the whole thing. It's in Spain, in the hands of idiots who are letting it go to ruin. I can have the land and the plant for a mere song. Your business will be to interview people ; you will represent me, for my time is precious. So you can pitch your resignation at the head of Langoulacque . . . later I will give you a share of the profits. They will run to thirty thousand francs the first year. But I warn you—I want to be quite fair—I stop at a hundred thousand. That must be the limit. What you've got to do is to live up to your position. You have no expensive tastes, and your car will form part of your necessary expenses. Then there's the question of offices—they should be in the rue Auber or the Avenue de l'Opéra. I will furnish a room for you in the English style, with leather arm-chairs and a clock in a mahogany case. We will have tables equal in size opposite each other ; I shall sit at the one that has a window on the left because of my eyesight. You will only see me for five minutes every day, but of course I shall be in command . . . I'm afraid, Madame, I shall have to take your husband away for a matter of six weeks ; we must go to Spain to get into touch with headquarters. I'll take good care of him, never fear ! In a fortnight or so from now I will come and take you by surprise at about eight o'clock ; I will ask you to give me some dinner, and we will arrange everything over dessert."

In conclusion, he remarked, pinching Marie-Louise's cheek :

"And this young person shan't go to the altar empty-handed."



M., Mme., and Mlle. Gouverneur were dumb-founded. When the guest had departed, Marie-Louise could not restrain her exultation.

"Isn't it wonderful? We shall have real silver for the table. I was ashamed to-night of our horn-handled knives. And you will buy me a white fox stole, won't you, father?"

M. Gouverneur smiled.

"Not so fast, not so fast!"

He added:

"What you say is true enough; I had not noticed our knives before. Mine was loose in the handle, and wobbled about when I used it . . . He's a wonderful fellow, that Feutrier! A hundred thousand a year . . . He thinks nothing of that, not he! Grant that he exaggerates—but fifty thousand—I shouldn't be surprised . . . We will continue to live quietly and economically as if nothing had happened. As for the car, I shall have it out of the expenses allowed me. You can use it to drive in the Bois now and then. Perhaps we shall have to give up these rooms; in the first place, because it will be necessary to entertain, and secondly, because Auteuil is really too far from the rue Auber or the Avenue de l'Opéra. Personally, I should prefer the Avenue de l'Opéra . . ."

Mme. Gouverneur shrugged her shoulders.

"Mercy on us, are they both out of their senses? Because this fine gentleman comes here with his rigmaroles, their imagination runs away with them! One sees herself already in a motor-car with a white fox stole round her neck; the other thinks of taking a fine flat. Yesterday we were very well satisfied with this one; we thought the view splendid, and were content with the serviceableness

of our old knives, which don't look up to much, but which cut very well. Your Feutrier . . ."

"My Feutrier," declared M. Gouverneur, "is an extraordinary character! And a wonderfully good sort."

His wife was going to reply, but she suddenly pounced on the maid.

"I can't congratulate you on your waiting at table! Your thumb was always in the sauces; you'll have to improve on that, my girl, and quickly, too . . ."

And in a voice that trembled a little:

"What would you look like if we kept a manservant, as we possibly may do in a little while? . . ."

"Oh, Mamma!" cried Marie-Louise, clapping her hands, "you have come round, have you?"

From that moment they began to make plans for a more luxurious way of living. And a week slipped away in a glamour as of fairyland. The flat seemed now very inconvenient, so confined, with its whiffs from the cooking, the commonness of its furniture, the shabbiness of the carpets, and the awkwardness of the maid. The thought of their deliverer was in their every look, in their lightest word. He had said: "A fortnight . . ."

Two months elapsed. They had begun to give up hope when one fine evening, about eight o'clock, Feutrier walked in, in a dinner-jacket, carnation in button-hole.

"I have brought you a pot of caviare. It cost five louis. I mention that because it ought to be taken care of and put in a cool place."

He ate enough for four, and drank enough for eight, and declared that they were a family to be envied. At midnight, as he was taking his

departure, Mme. Gouverneur whispered to her husband:

"Whatever you do, get in a word . . ."

"Feutrier," cried M. Gouverneur in the hall, affecting a careless tone, "how about our business, old boy?"

"What business?"

"Ferraguz . . . in Spain . . . Our office in the rue Auber or the Avenue de l'Opéra, with the two tables and the window on the left . . ."

"Ah, yes . . . I have some vague recollection . . . Look here, Gustave. All these schemes of big business abroad—I am beginning to alter my mind about them . . . I let myself go like that in the heat of conversation . . . A word of advice. You have a fixed income; stick to it. A moderate fixed income paid on the nail is, after all, the best of certainties . . . Yes, by Jove, there's wisdom in being content with it . . . Why, I tell you there are moments when I very much wish I had it myself. Don't drop the substance for the shadow . . . I see I upset your peace of mind by what I said the other night. You don't know me!"

He went down. His step echoed dismally on the staircase. There was a silence. Then Mme. Gouverneur pulled herself together, passed her hand over her forehead, and, trying to speak in an everyday voice to hearten the others:

"Mélanie," said she, "put the remains of the caviare in the larder."

## XXVII

### THE MOONLIGHT SONATA

GENEVIÈVE had married her Pierre, and carried him off to a country-house in a remote part of the provinces. Here he soon made himself at home, yielding to the purely physical delights of an idle, sporting existence; yielding no less, with the reckless abandonment of youth in its first glory of a fine pair of eyes and a fair moustache, to the delights of the honeymoon.

Then some spirit of mischief led to that solitary spot Marie-Louise Villepront, an old school-friend of Geneviève, who came there for the sake of the health of a deplorably superannuated and infirm husband. From the moment they set eyes on each other, Pierre and Marie-Louise felt drawn together by a mutual attraction; the first touch of hand with hand conveyed an indefinable meaning. They frolicked together like overgrown children, affecting a sort of quarrelsome friendship, inventing games from which Geneviève was excluded on account of their extreme frivolity. The latter at first attributed her suspicions to the hyper-criticism of jealousy. Then she set a watch on

her husband, who flirted more openly each day, taxing all the resources of his ingenuity, puzzling his wits to find means of proving himself a Parisian in the presence of this Parisienne . . .

And Geneviève became very unhappy.

Marie-Louise came to the house almost every day, unattended, of course, by her husband: "He's running off the metals altogether, you know! He mistakes one word for another! 'Fry me a drum' for 'Bring me a handkerchief!' And, what seems most absurd, he has caught, I can't imagine how, the Alsatian accent, which makes one laugh in spite of oneself. Besides that, he eats enough for four; the dishes have to be taken away from him or he would choke himself."

Soon Pierre took to visiting her alone.

"I'm going by myself," he would say to his wife. "You would be too long dressing; I shall be back very soon."

One evening she could not restrain her resentment:

"You're not going there! I won't have you go there . . . Don't let her come any more . . . I am miserable . . ."

He shrugged his shoulders deprecatingly. .

"You little stupid, don't worry yourself! Do you want to know why I go to see Marie-Louise? Simply to hear her play the piano. There, are you satisfied now? You know my passion for music. Marie-Louise plays so delightfully! I listen as if I were at a concert, without taking any notice of the performer. Why, I don't even know the colour of her hair!"

She handed him his overcoat humbly, begging him to forgive her and to forget a moment of foolish-

ness. When he returned at midnight, she called him to her as he was going up to his room, threw her bare arms round his neck, and offered him her trembling lips :

"I do hope you are not angry with me? I am so silly, my nerves get the better of me . . ."

He denied it in rather a shamefaced manner, drawing back from the proffered kiss :

"Angry? Why should I be angry? Look here, this is childishness."

She disengaged herself from him, and reflected for a moment. Then :

"Did Marie-Louise play well this evening?"

"Splendidly."

"Why does she not play when she is here?"

"What! On our old tin-pot affair? You don't think of what you are saying. It has broken chords, and gives out the most doleful sounds."

Then she asked him to go to Paris and buy a first-rate piano.

"I shan't mind her playing then; it will give me pleasure."

He agreed to this, and peace was restored. Some days afterwards a very handsome instrument arrived. Pierre himself undertook to instal it in its new home. He chose for its destination his study, a lofty, dim-lit room, through which stained-glass windows filtered glimmerings as of precious stones. It was there that Pierre had written *Ombre et Mystère*, a collection of spiritless poems, the title of which, in English and underlined with a flourish, had been displayed in the shop-window of the principal library in Ferte-Poussis, the nearest town. Geneviève never ventured into this sanctum, where the privileged occupant,

under the pretext of literary research, smoked innumerable pipes and indulged in countless naps. When she passed the door of the sacred place she walked on tip-toe and gathered up her skirts lest she should frighten away the mystic messengers of inspiration.

As the shades of evening fell, Marie-Louise paid them a visit and was invited to examine the piano.

Geneviève opened the door with all solemnity, and in an awed voice :

"It is here," she whispered, indicating a table on which lay a riding-whip, "it is here that he wrote *Ombre et Mystère*."

Marie-Louise smiled :

"Verses, eh? Not in my line . . ."

Then she sat down at the piano, struck two or three chords, and said :

"I will play this evening with the room darkened. I, too, love shadow and mystery . . ."

They returned to this sanctuary after dinner. Through the open windows the spectral light of the moon crept in. It was a clear and serene, a hushed and balmy night. Marie-Louise played the Moonlight Sonata . . . Entranced by the music, it was only by a supreme effort that Geneviève restrained her tears. Pierre felt the flutter of a meek kiss over his hair. He started with an unfeeling exclamation of "Hush!" and as Marie-Louise rose :

"Oh, once more!" he entreated. "If you only knew the pleasure you give me—and above all with that Moonlight Sonata. I could hear it twenty times, a hundred times!"

Always willing to please, she played it again. Then she suggested a stroll in the park. But there,



try as they would, they could not fall into their old gaiety, or even talk coherently.

"The master-voice of Beethoven," said Pierre, giving expression to their feelings, "still sings within us !"

From that evening Geneviève began to recover her spirits. She left Marie-Louise and her husband to themselves, reassured by the circumstance that the music went on unceasingly. She concluded that love of art was the link between them, and nothing else in the world.

"I can't imagine what my wife's about," remarked Pierre to Marie-Louise. "Hang it, I'm not jealous ; but four or five times a week she is off to town, and when I ask her what is the attraction at Ferte-Poussis, which does not seem to offer much amusement, she puts her finger to her lip, and won't explain."

A year rolled by. In the course of that year Geneviève experienced alternations of joy, of hope, of distrust.

"I must find some means of winning him back," she had said.

And she felt at last that the psychological hour had struck.

One evening before the advent of Marie-Louise, she sent a note apologising for not being able to receive her, as she was unwell. She said nothing to Pierre, who went up into his room and dressed with great elaboration : ties tied, untied, changed, finally selected : scents artistically mingled. Satisfied with himself at last, he slipped quietly into the study.

With beating heart, as if she were about to commit a crime, Geneviève passes by the table, the cele-

brated table at which the poet has written *Ombre et Mystère*, and which was now covered with dusty papers. She opens the piano, and, with soft pedal down, begins to play the Moonlight Sonata. For she knows it, that sonata, knows it to the point of saturation. For twelve months, five times a week, she has rehearsed it with Mlle. Plé, an Academician, the only music-teacher in Ferte-Poussis, and an old pupil of the great Trimurti. A thousand times and more has she industriously gone through this piece, which Marie-Louise plays, with no particular feeling certainly, but with wonderful execution. Her scheme had been to recover the waning affection of her Pierre! And to this end she has endured the twaddling chatter of Mlle. Plé, in a gloomy apartment which smelt of snuff and mutton chops. At last the instructress had said to her :

“ Now I have nothing more to teach you. You only know one piece, but you play it, I really believe, almost as well as my revered master, M. Trimurti, himself ! ”

And now at this critical moment Geneviève's fingers tremble. She plays the sonata so brilliantly at Mlle. Plé's—is she going to play it badly now ?

The door opens. Geneviève braces herself : she must show her superiority to the other performer, her rival . . . Pierre is here. Is he about to throw himself on his knees, dropping tears of repentance, pouring out his gratitude for the heroic struggle she has made for his sake ?

Alas, he softly draws near, and in a gay tone of voice gives utterance to these incomprehensible words :

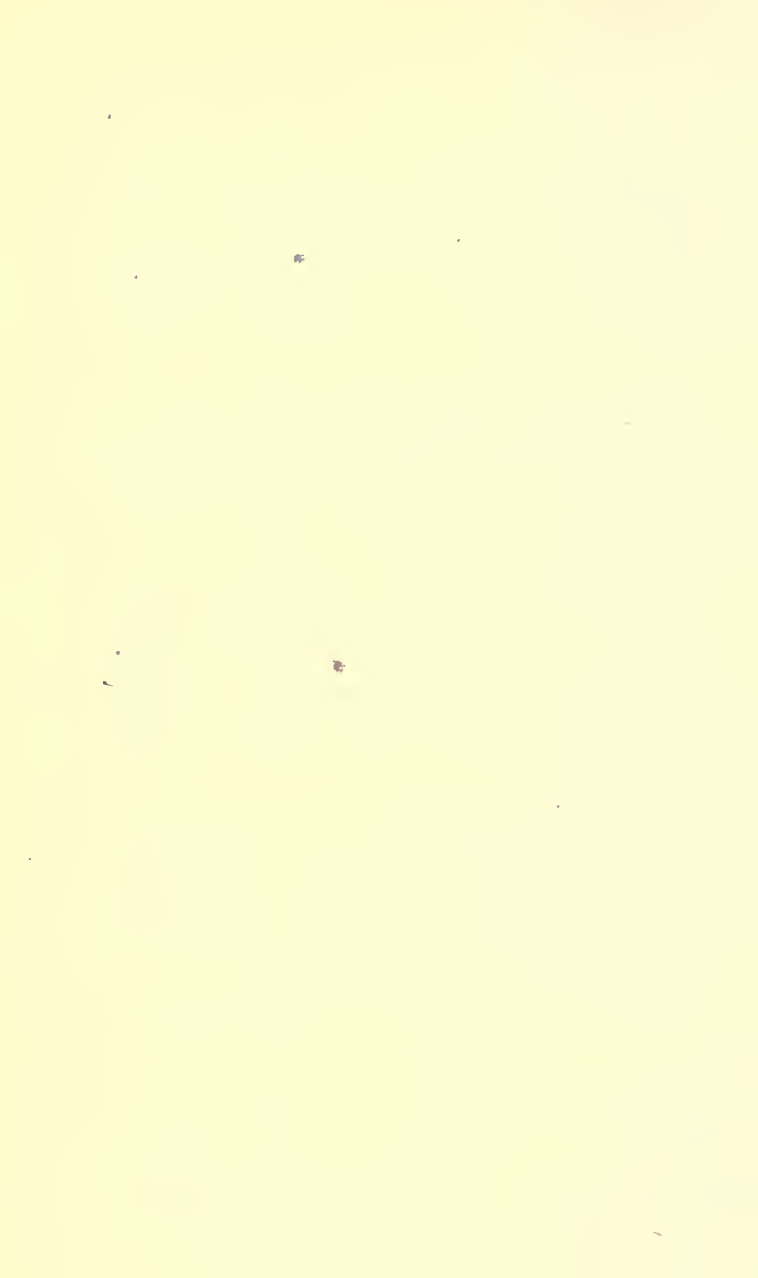
“ Marie-Louise, my darling, you can't have

pressed the button properly . . . the piano isn't playing up to the mark . . . Just wait a moment."

Passing behind his wife, whom he does not recognise, he feels about, then presses a button. Under her fingers, paralysed with astonishment, the keys fall and rise of their own accord, and the electric soul of the instrument throws itself with triumphant confidence into the first bars of the Moonlight Sonata.

And as Geneviève, completely crushed, buries her head in her hands, the executioner of a husband impresses a kiss on the back of her neck and murmurs :

" Marie, mine, I adore you . . . "



## XXVIII

### MACHEDRUC

“WHAT’S your name?”

“Machedruc.”

The police-sergeant looked up. Difficult to believe the owner of such a name innocent, especially when it belonged to a brute with a crumpled-up face, pointed ears and formidable jaws. In addition, the man was clothed in shapeless trousers and a sort of cloak made of some material resembling a coarse drugget.

“As the lady describes someone quite different, it’s possible you didn’t steal the purse; but you must try and get something more nearly approaching trousers, you know. Your legs show through the holes. Now you can clear out.”

And Machedruc cleared out with a grunt of satisfaction. Why should he have taken a purse? He lived alone and did not drink; the water from the public fountain sufficed. Besides, he had so little imagination that the idea of thieving never entered his skull. Moreover, he had no quickness either of body or mind, and his whole appearance put folks on their guard. His journey through

life was confined to its blind alleys, and it dragged along with never-ceasing weariness. Thieves were not so badly dressed. He was only a Parisian vagabond who knew nothing of Paris except certain haunts—places where you can sink down on a bench to munch questionable food, or where you can give way to slothfulness and sleep.

“Look out there, vermin !”

Just missed by a motor-car, Machedruc hurried on. Finding himself for once in the rue de la Paix, he had been arrested in a street row—a lady had discovered that she had been robbed of her purse. He was returning now towards those squalid by-streets impregnated with villainous odours, at the end of which were meagre traces of green fields. The scene was in harmony with his ragged figure ; he was hardly noticeable notwithstanding his beggar's rags, his wallet and his gnarled stick.

But as he walked, a feeling of exhaustion overcame him. His visit to the police-station had given him the shudder of a wild beast which has known for some moments the agony of being caged ; he was hungry, thirsty, heated, and his feet pained him.

Then it came into his head to go into a museum. There he would find rest and coolness. Ever since he had been seized by the collar he had meditated on certain problems. They had no right to arrest him ; he had a right to go into the museum because the museum was free to everyone. The wrong he had suffered gave him an inkling of his rights. He went in.

At first he would have liked to stretch himself in the shadow of an Egyptian sarcophagus and go to sleep. But people had no right to sleep on benches

or in public libraries or in squares or in museums. That he well knew. Besides, he could sleep as he walked along. And he found himself up in a picture-gallery, less pleasant, it was true, than the shady ground-floor, but there was not a soul but himself. He sat down and forced himself to keep his eyes open so that he should keep well within his rights. And for the first time in his life he looked at a picture.

It was an eighteenth century portrait. It depicted a young girl with softly smiling lips, cruel eyes and ingenious brow; her bodice was of crimson silk; a simple riband bound her hair; her whole being told of the sweetness of life, the joys of youth; and Machedruc conceived the happy idea of blowing her a kiss. Only he did not know how; his uncouth lips encountered his clenched fist. To look seemed to him a new kind of game. He had never looked at anything, he had never wanted to look at anything, neither windows ablaze with light, nor jewellers' shop-fronts, nor glitter of coin on the counters of money-changers, nor women; he had seen nothing but the way he went and his feet that stumbled along. Then came the thought of stealing—the instinct of the child that takes what it wants. There was no pause. He took down the picture, put it under his cloak, and walked out calmly.

The museum seemed to sleep in the summer drowse, and no attendant interfered with the vagabond. Outside, he picked up some paper and wrapped his prize in it. Not for a moment did he think of making money out of his capture. No, he felt vaguely the need of this painted face, and he took it. But where was he to put it? He went and



bought the evening papers, sold them, realised a profit of three francs, and took a garret in a miserable lodging-house. When he had shut himself in, he took down the looking glass that was on the wall, and hung up the picture in its place. Then he pulled out of his pocket a flask of brandy and commenced to drink. When he had drunk until he had lost his breath, he took a piece of chalk and added a moustache to the picture. This seemed to him so tremendously funny that he laughed—he who had never laughed. Then leaving his bed intact, he lay down on the floor and went off suddenly into a dead sleep.

He did not wake until about five in the morning, when the sunrise woke him, a light that danced in its youthful joy; and the man who usually at that hour shrank from the threatening fist of the police, had the sensation of being caressed. At first he just felt glad to be alone and in a room. Then he shrank within himself. This wild beast, shaggy, rugged, with bloodshot eyes and dishevelled hair—it was himself, himself seen in the looking-glass which he had removed the day before to hang up the picture.

His picture! . . .

He said good-day to it, disturbed by some strange feeling, a sort of pleasurable sadness. The young girl smiled at him beneath her moustache. Touched with penitence, he took a cloth and wiped away the chalk.

“There, my beauty,” he muttered, “your face is clean now!”

Then he sat on the bed and looked at her again. It was as if his eyes were thirsty, and the sight of that fair young flesh gave him drink. There was

no need for the light that flooded the room—the picture of itself lit it up. Then Machedruc began to make signs to her, nodding his head.

“She is answering me!” he said.

And really she seemed to answer him. Other women fled at his approach, but this one smiled on him; she smiled on him only, on no other, because he had carried her away, because she was his own. It was true she smiled on him with a little disdain; but when love tumbles on a poor wretch, it tumbles from a great height. Machedruc knew what joy was, and pride. His joy came from his new faculty of looking, his pride from the new experience of being looked at.

“She is looking at me,” he said.

He sought in some dim unknown past for tender words, words of deep emotion which would express love.

“Saucy slut!” he murmured, with unutterable tenderness.

Meanwhile he found that he had come to the end of his three francs, and he went out to get the day's sustenance. He came back at ten at night with five twenty-sou pieces jingling in his pocket, like a cheerful workman who brings home his wages to his wife. More than that, he had had a shave and his hair cut. He stood before the glass and was astonished to find himself looking young. In spite of his twisted jaw, he had a modest frank look, because of his eyes, which were of the profoundest blue.

He put his candle before the portrait, and thought vaguely of the illumined altars that are seen when church doors are open. Fairyland, something hitherto impossible, had come into his life.

He felt the necessity of hearing his own voice so as to be sure that it was not a dream :

“ She keeps looking at me ! ” he said.

He sidled to the left, came back again, sidled to the right. The eyes followed him.

“ I’m going dotty now ! ” he groaned, clasping his feeble head in his hands.

That night he lay down before the picture, lost in admiration, until the candle flickered out ; and in the darkness he still saw, more dazzling than ever, the virgin bosom of the Unknown, her delicate wrists—her lips.

Machedruc’s life was perforce one of chastity : he would have terrified the most abandoned of women. Of too fierce an aspect to awaken pity, he went his way with lowered head and clenched fists ; people scattered at his approach ; he had not had the least idea of gentleness or of kindness. Sometimes, however, he had spoken to women. It was at night, when it rained, in low places. The darkness half-hid his unsightliness and wretchedness, wrapping them in a sort of winding sheet, and the women had said :

“ Keep clear of him—the bully ! ”

He protested his harmlessness : he was not a bully ; he was not even a beggar. His trade—good God !—his trade was to go his way and take what offered. No one gave him of their charity, because those who ask for it do not usually carry a cudgel bristling with spiky knobs. And even those women did not offer him the contemptible, inestimable charity which would have rendered him less miserable. They would not have crouched up against him to avoid the bitterest cold . . .

While the girl in the picture ! . . .

He was always apostrophising her with ecstatic phrases :

“ My little pretty, you have put your riband in your hair, you have put on your beautiful bodice. It is clear you are glad to be here. You know it is all yours, this room ! ”

He sold his papers every day, not as newsvendors do who are satisfied with a profit of fifty centimes, with their half-pint, their penny-worth of bread, and their doss-house bed at night, but with feverish alacrity that astonished himself. He was becoming ambitious ; he wanted to make sure of a happy home for his heart's delight. So that no one should see her but himself, he did his own cleaning up, and swept out his room with desperate zeal. At the foot of the picture an artificial cornflower bloomed naively in a tumbler of water.

But hard times were coming. They were the consequences of a bad fall, and Machedruc, with a crippled leg, could not work. His savings melted away ; the lodging-house keeper turned him out of his room. And one fine day he found himself again in the street with the picture under his arm. “ Where am I to put it ? ” he meditated. One could not take so sweet a thing as this, his friend, to a night-shelter, or into some foul den where drunken hiccoughs . . .

Then he felt an immense pity for his “ little pretty.” No, he could not let her share his lot ; he would give her the surroundings of a brilliant hall, with polished floor and glittering walls. He went back to the museum, found the picture-room empty, and quickly hung up the portrait in the place which was still vacant.

"There, my pretty, rest at your ease," he said.  
"Good-bye."

He did not shed tears, for one must have known what happiness is to do that ; but he felt the agony of loneliness. He did not know where to go now, with his leg hurting him badly. He could not stay there anyhow ; people don't stay in a cemetery, and he felt as if he were there to bury a dead person. He must look at her one last time, passionately, his soul in his hungry gaze—look, till some mist of sorrowfulness should veil the cruel eyes . . .

"Come, my fine fellow," said an attendant approaching, "move along ; this is not the time of year for you ; you will find it pleasanter outside. Yes, I know, you're looking at the pictures, but the thing that puzzles me is what the devil you can see in them !"

## XXIX

### THE MESSAGE ON THE WALL

THERE was a stampede in the nursing-home, and a hurried whispering of nurses. "It's the husband of No. 19!" "What! M. Mulette?" "M. Mulette himself!—O Lord!" "Does the superintendent know?" "Yes, he's got his work cut out." "Madame Honoré, if he asks you, say it was a tumour . . ."

M. Mulette, panting, perspiring, fuming with impatience, waited in the drawing-room. He was a burly man of fifty, with a bald forehead, a moustache turning white, and an appearance of being the most peaceable and commonplace individual in the world, save that he was tanned and browned by the suns of Africa. He had returned unexpectedly after an absence abroad of fourteen months, and had found no one in his untidy flat but a caretaker three parts imbecile. Madame was ill and had been taken away; that was all she knew. It was only by angry threats that he could get out of her the address of the nursing-home, where, trembling with anxiety, he had now arrived. They had just shown him into the drawing-room,

where he sat chafing, staring absently at the inevitable india-rubber tree in its gaudy ornamental pot, the furniture upholstered in red velvet, the periodicals scattered about the table, the advertisements of dentistry and boarding-houses. At last, unable to contain himself any longer, he came out and called to an attendant :

" I want to see my wife—do you hear there ? "

Hé rapped on the stone corridor with his stick.

" Go and fetch the superintendent. "

The superintendent made his appearance and bowed.

" Please follow me, Monsieur. "

M. Mulette, somewhat relieved, questioned him, a quaver in his voice :

" Tell me, doctor, what has been the trouble ? Is she better now ? "

The doctor explained. Mme. Mulette had suffered from a tumour ; an immediate operation had been necessary. Now they were satisfied that she was out of danger. Convalescence would follow in the natural course of things.

" You are not deceiving me, doctor ? You are keeping nothing back ? "

" No, I assure you, Monsieur. "

" And I may see her ? "

" Immediately. Only I cannot allow you more than ten minutes with her. She is still weak. "

A hand-cart loaded with surgical appliances obliged them to step aside. M. Mulette resumed :

" A terrible business, these long voyages . . . One knows nothing of what is happening ; you feel perfectly at ease while a catastrophe is hanging over your head. She is out of danger, you say ? You are sure ? "



"Quite out of danger . . ."

The doctor knocked at the door and then opened it.

"Madame, here is your husband. I did not wish to forbid you seeing him, but I must impress upon you not to talk too much and not to excite yourself. Come in, Monsieur . . . I will leave you . . ."

"My poor Lucie!" began M. Mulette.

Meanwhile the doctor called the nurse to him.

"There's a scare for you! Confounded boor—he must needs drop from the clouds when he was least expected. There's nothing lying about?"

"Don't alarm yourself," replied the nurse, "everyone knows exactly what to do; we shall carry it off without a hitch. Besides, he has the look of a good-natured fool, that big fellow; he will not suspect anything. Silly man to go away for fourteen months and leave a pretty wife . . . If you had seen her when I told her her husband was here! I thought she was going to faint. She cried out: 'He is so passionate! He will kill me!' A novice, that; she plays pranks without a thought of the consequences . . ."

M. Mulette remained standing, awed by the darkness of the little chamber, amid which appeared the pale face of his wife.

"How are you now, Lucie?"

"Oh, better, much better," she said. "And you, Ferdinand? To think that you have come back!"

"I could not stay away longer . . . a presentiment of some trouble . . . I wanted to give you a surprise . . . I had no suspicion . . . My poor Lucie . . . How suddenly it has come upon you! You said nothing in your letters . . . Well, I got home; I found the place turned upside

down, and that idiot Hortense looking flabbergasted. She didn't want to give me the address of the Nursing Home . . . But you are out of danger—that's all that matters . . . I've brought you back some wonderful things and no mistake : a whole heap of baroque pearls . . . embroidered robes . . . magnificent feathers . . . You will see when you get home . . . And you have been dreadfully ill, my poor darling ? ”

“ Dreadfully ill.”

“ And now it is a perfect recovery ? ”

“ Perfect.”

“ We'll forget it as a thing past and gone . . . You are going to have as many hats and dresses as you like, and damn the expense ! Yes, I've made a pile ; I've brought back a pot of money . . . We'll take a better flat . . . No end of plans . . . I may kiss you ? . . . Oh, yes, gently . . . on the forehead . . . Ah, my little girl, my little girl ! ”

He rose, tears in his voice as he faltered out tender words. Suddenly he was stricken motionless and white. He had just seen, on a side table, an infant's feeding bottle three parts full of milk. And he could not take his eyes from this object left there by the maddest oversight. Mme. Mulette repressed a cry. Her pleading eyes, full of remorse, of fear, of helplessness, turned from her husband to the bottle . . . M. Mulette braced himself up.

“ So you drink nothing but milk,” he said quietly. “ And from a feeding bottle ! . . . Can't they contrive anything better than that, by Jove ? . . . After all, it's not a bad notion . . . Are you thirsty ? ”

He caught the whisper of a stifled "yes." He took the bottle in his hand, which trembled a little, and held it to the pallid lips. But Mme. Mulette could not drink; her teeth chattered.

"I will put it there, then, near you. You will be better by and by. I will not stay longer to-day; the doctor said ten minutes, and he would scold me. I will go now . . . You are all in a flutter, my Lucie. Hang it, after an operation there's nothing wonderful in that! Rest now, try and sleep. I will come again to-morrow."

"You will come . . ."

"Why, of course! Do you think I'm going to desert my little girl? Be careful of yourself, dearest. And good-bye till to-morrow."

"Won't you kiss me again?"

"Yes, yes!"

He bent over her, imprinted a kiss on her damp forehead, took in his hands the little icy hand.

"Till to-morrow, then!"

He closed the door softly, called to the nurse, "I think Madame wants you," darted off like a gust of wind, forgetting to put on his hat, ran down the staircase, passed the superintendent without noticing his scared salutation, walked along an interminable Boulevard, and sank down at last on a bench. But he jumped up again in a sudden paroxysm of rage. He would return to Lucie's bedside; he would question her—would know all. And then he would . . .

People stared at him. He put on his hat and walked on. Calmer now, it was himself he blamed. His continued absences had been caused by more than the desire of acquiring wealth, of making Lucie's life a dream of gilded ease. There

was something else: the passion for adventure, a hankering after solitude, in spite of the beauty and charm of that sweet comrade whom he had chosen suddenly when he had believed himself capable of settling down at last and living as did other men. Left all alone, she must have struggled bravely, only to yield at last to the indefatigable persistence of some practised and unscrupulous libertine. He imagined her regrets and remorse, and the terror she must have felt when he saw that forgotten bottle . . .

He would go away again, that was all. He had controlled himself, and he would continue to do so. He would not be a husband like all the others. He kept on repeating: "My little girl, my little girl!" as if it were really his own child that had been besmirched. His heart was full, but it was with pity; his grief had in it something of a father's, that did more than forgive, that found excuses . . .

When Lucie's health was restored, he decided on another absence of two years. He installed her in a secluded house hidden amid lofty trees. "There she will have her child brought to her," he reflected. He often wished to open his arms to her, to let her tell him the whole story; but she would have died of the shame of it; and he shrank from the thought of robbing her of the confidence she was regaining. He left her more beautiful than ever, full of health, overflowing with gratitude. When he took leave of her, as if obeying some sudden instinct, she caught his hand and kissed it.

In the space of four years he returned only twice, and, alleging important business, stayed

barely three weeks. But he felt he had grown old. He was tired, worn out by the weight of his secret ; yet he deferred a return for good and all till his heart should have outlived every passion. At last he said to Lucie one day :

“ I think I am going for my last voyage. We are rich enough now, and I have earned the right to rest.”

He went into the linen-room to inspect his trunks. He looked about him, that regretful last look which seems to say : “ Till we meet again ” to beloved places. And he saw on the wall three little pencil-marks. He was sure of their meaning : Lucie, as mothers will, had recorded there with pride the growth of her child. M. Mulette remembered that his own mother marked his height on the wall in the same way, but her marks were not faint ones, nor tremulous with shame. They were there to be seen by everyone. While this other child, poor little innocent, brought secretly to the house . . .

He would like to speak—but he expressed himself so badly ! A letter ? He did not know how to put in words what he felt. So he took out his pencil and wrote opposite the last mark :

“ What a big fellow he will be when I come back !—F.M.”



### XXX

#### THE KISS

WONDER of wonders ! M. Simeon Gibmuller, the manufacturer of "art bronzes," the unapproachable, the strait-laced M. Gibmuller, as the Louis XVth clock left as security by an impecunious client struck the hour of 12 a.m., M. Gibmuller so far relaxed his severity as to say to his junior clerk :

" You are going home, Clairot ? "

" No, that is to say yes, Monsieur Gibmuller ; or, rather, if you wish, Monsieur Gibmuller, I will stay as long as you please, Monsieur Gibmuller, till one, two, or three o'clock, M. Gibmuller . . . "

He repeated the sacred name, as young authors use the word " Master," or as courtiers reiterate " Your Majesty." But M. Gibmuller shook his head.

" No, I wasn't thinking of that . . . I was thinking that you must be glad to go home—to have a home to go to. Oh, I can imagine that it is not a magnificent one . . . How much are you earning here ? "

" Two hundred and sixty-five francs a month,



M. Gibmuller ; if I could bring it up to three hundred francs, it would mean a good deal to us."

"Exactly what I earned at your age ; only in my case there was ambition. We lived in a garret ; we were gay as larks ; Mme. Gibmuller contrived little feasts, delicious little dishes . . . It is fifteen years—since I lost her, fifteen years, Clairot, since I have tasted boiled beef as it should be. In the big restaurants they serve it on flat plates and dishes with a whole crowd of accessories, as if to apologise for its flavour ! . . . You are hungry, Clairot, you are lucky ; go, my friend, I will not detain you . . ."

"If I might venture, M. Gibmuller . . . It would be the greatest pleasure . . . My wife cooks boiled beef to perfection . . ."

It was with the desperate boldness of the timid that he proffered his invitation, which was accepted. It was for the following Friday, and in a homely way ; they were to be taken just as they were. In his excitement the clerk forgot to divest himself of the shabby little jacket he kept at the office, tied his cravat all awry, clapped on his hat anyhow, and was off, the skirts of his overcoat unfurling themselves in a gust of triumph. He came home flushed and radiant with exultation, and told the great news to Mme. Clairot. The latter, a pretty blonde, amiable and self-possessed, evidently superior to her husband, greeted this ebullition of childish pleasure with a placid smile.

"Well, Madeleine," expostulated Clairot, "you hardly seem to grasp the importance of what I am telling you. The governor is to dine here on Friday ! . . . A man who, as a rule, scarcely ever speaks to anyone . . . Chouttemard, the

cashier, has been in the house twenty-nine years, and, barring business, he hasn't spoken to him more than twice in all that time . . . For all my retiring manner, I know how to push my own interests. If you had only heard me! 'My wife manages boiled beef to perfection, Monsieur Gibmuller' . . . They will have something to talk about, the boys in the office, when they hear that the master has been dining here!"

That word "Master" irritated Madeleine; she gave a little shrug of annoyance, but instantly checked herself and stroked her husband's hair, saying: "All right, we'll do our best to tame the monster," and touched his meek forehead with her pretty lips.

A visit from a personage of such pretensions to so modest a dwelling is preceded by laborious preparations of which the "idle rich" have no conception, and which would soften the hardest heart. It was settled that, besides the boiled beef, there should be a cheese soup, a *carpe à l'alsacienne* and an *omelette au rhum*. During the whole of Sunday, Clairot, humming a marching-song, polished up the dilapidated plate with worn-out initials, and straightened out the teeth of the forks.

"They were used by my mother and grandmother—quite antique, you know. M. Gibmuller, who is a connoisseur, will appreciate them."

The couple differed on the subject of flowers. Madeleine wanted to have a quantity of them, to make up for the shortcomings of the dining-room, with its small sideboard, its bare, hard chairs, and its only picture wherein a wounded stag shed his blood over a fruit-dish.

"M. Gibmuller," explained Clairot, "won't trouble himself about the smell of the onions in the soup. He is a simple creature, although a multi-millionaire . . . Perhaps he will come in his car . . . I know the chauffeur; I put my pride in my pocket and cultivate him because he has great influence with the governor . . . I reckon that the governor must have at least four millions. At seven per cent. that gives him two hundred and eighty thousand francs a year, besides the hundred and fifty thousand he makes out of the bronzes . . . Why, if he were to give us only six months of his income, we might go and grow cabbages in Brittany . . . I put it at seven per cent., but it might easily run to ten per cent. . ."

"Ah," interrupted Madeleine, tired to death, "if it did, it wouldn't put a sou more in our pockets."

In the evening, to a couple of tiresome visitors, a school-teacher and a drawing-master who came to take coffee, Clairot pointed out the chair on which M. Gibmuller would sit, and the place he would occupy at table: "A man who has nearly fifteen hundred francs to spend every day of his life!"

His gay volubility bewildered Madeleine. She had arrived at a time of life when women who have never known happiness long in their departing youth but for one thing—freedom from care; and she had that sunset ray of beauty which is seen in beauty's last hour. There were few mirrors in her house, and little ones at that. It was enough for her to look at her hands; in them she saw the insidious flight of her youth; those hands, dry in their whiteness and thin in their delicacy. And when she pondered over them, her eyes expressed so much that Clairot, troubled in his dull wits,

would say: "What's the matter?" Madeleine would look up with a forced smile. "I don't know what's the matter with you," her husband would mutter; "you are unlike other people."

At long last the Friday came. About seven o'clock, her nerves on edge with the droning excitement of the clerk, Madeleine sent him out to buy confectionery and liqueurs. Mother Cireault, the charwoman, who was to wait at table, had also gone home to put on her best dress. Alone, with heightened colour, a blue apron tied round her waist, having laid the cloth, Madeleine gave an eye to the meat that was boiling while she put a garnish of parsley and chervil round the fine carp glazed with jelly. Suddenly a ring at the bell sounded.

"Mother Cireault comes up by the servants' staircase; Clairot has his key; it must be M. Gibmuller," said she to herself, horrified.

She ran into the lobby, where she heard the hoarse panting of the old man, out of breath after mounting six flights of steep stairs. She opened the door.

"Monsieur Clairot?"

Madeleine in the half-light of the lobby disguised her voice:

"This way, please, Monsieur; Monsieur and Madame will be in directly."

She showed him into the dining-room and stealthily made her way into the kitchen. In a little while she would slip into the bedroom, put her hair in order and wash her hands. What an idea! To come at seven! . . . Clairot, thrown off his balance, would be awkward with his profuse apolo-

gies . . . She hurriedly set about preparing the omelette . . .

Meanwhile, M. Gibmuller grew tired of waiting. He looked exactly like the King of Hearts, with his bulky proportions, his beard, and his thick hair, which he wore long to indicate that his business had to do with works of art. He was flattered by seeing in the place of honour a photograph under which appeared these words: *Bronze presented to M. Simeon Gibmuller in grateful admiration by his staff*. Then he examined the stag and the fruit-dish of the one picture, bestowed a contemptuous condescending glance upon the flowers, blew his nose, sat down, jumped up again, regretted that he had come, and at last deliberately opened the door leading into the kitchen. Madeleine felt the approach of disaster, and bent over the cooking holding her breath.

“By gad!” cried M. Gibmuller, “it smells nice here. You’ve got there a bit of boiled beef which is not tainted with cockroaches. And a *carpe à l’alsacienne* . . . That’s all right, although I’m not an Alsatian myself; I am Swiss originally, but a true Frenchman of France, my dear, a true son of the soil and devoted to the ladies . . . You’re remarkably pretty, you know . . . Do I frighten you? . . . Come, I wasn’t always sixty, and I didn’t always have a corporation to carry about with me. I remember the time when all the girls liked me; they used to call me ‘Handsome Brighteyes’ . . . And I took them to Nugent. Turn round a little that I may see your face . . . You won’t? Good! The side face is pretty enough for me . . . and I won’t lose my chance because it’s only a side-face . . . Ah,

she's a curious one, this! Naughty girl, to try to hide by pretending to look for something in the saucepan! Wait a moment!"

Madeleine heard this monologue as though it were coming through the misty atmosphere of a nightmare. She thought of nothing but hiding herself, hiding her dirty hands, her perspiring face, her dishevelled hair; but Gibmuller's breath is already upon her, and she feels all of a sudden the touch of moist lips upon her cheek. She gives utterance to such an extraordinary "Oh!" of astonishment, shame and disgust that the old boy, rather abashed, retires to the dining-room, where he sits down, meditating profoundly. He opines that in his time cooks were less difficult. This one yelled as if she had been approached by a leech. When people invite a city magnate to dinner they might at least give their servants a word of warning. This fool of a girl might tell them about the kiss, for anything he knew, and make him seem ridiculous. He began to hum: "I have in my pocket a hundred-sou piece—for a good little girl . . ."

At this moment a key was turned in the lock; Clairot came running in, loaded with bottles and packages.

"Monsieur Gibmuller! And I not here to welcome you! Pray accept my fullest apologies, Monsieur Gibmuller . . ."

"I came a good deal before the time," explained his chief; "don't worry on my account."

Clairot deprecated the idea. Worry himself! On the contrary, he knew very well that M. Gibmuller should be received with all the respect due to his eminent position, but otherwise without ceremony.



And he began to talk of the house of business, of the lad Saturnin, who could hardly make himself intelligible on account of a cleft palate, of the cashier, Chouttemard, a worthy man, but one who was visibly breaking up. The chief replied mechanically, his thoughts on other matters.

But here is Madeleine, very simple and neat in her plain blue dress, very pretty—and very pale.

“Monsieur Gibmuller,” announces Clairot in a stately manner, “I have the honour of introducing my wife to you.”

The old man feels a little pang at his heart. He stands shuffling his feet like a bear; and in the brief interval of silence, he divines Madeleine’s anxiety. She must take him for an old ruffian, must be asking herself whether he will revenge himself on the little clerk for her disdain; he realises at the same time the excitement which his arrival must have caused the household, the anxiety inseparable from such an unaccustomed banquet . . . Yes, yes, he has had experience of all that . . . and the plate polished up as if all the future depended upon it; and the trepidation as to the freshness of the fish and the cooking of the meat . . . He has mistaken Mme. Clairot for the cook! What stupidity! And he searches his mind for some way of being forgiven, for the word of excuse he cannot find.

“I am greatly touched, Madame . . . I understand so well. I have been rich for a long time, but I have not forgotten . . . These flowers . . . this hanging lamp . . . this sideboard . . . I have known all this . . . I and my poor wife . . . Our dining-room was like yours . . . and it makes the tears come into my eyes.”



Then, as if he sought to obliterate the impression of the hateful salute of a few moments ago, he opens his arms in a paternal manner, and with much emotion :

"Come, Madame," he falters, "I'm going to ask permission to kiss you. May I?"

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